

THE UK'S BIGGEST REGIONAL GAY LIFESTYLE MAGAZINE

PICK ME UP
I'm FREE

ZONE

FEBRUARY 2018 ISSUE 250

READERS' AWARDS 2018

*Top 5 Finalists
are revealed -
Get voting for
your WINNER!*

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW STEPHEN BAILEY

*Gay comedian comes
to the Midlands*



LOVE IS IN THE AIR

It's our annual Valentine's issue!



**VIRAL
SCENE
GADGETS
WHAT'S ON
COMPETITIONS**



Birmingham **LGBT**

Supported by  **umbrella**

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🌐 umbrellahealth.co.uk

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📱 [umbrellaatbirminghamlgbt](https://www.facebook.com/umbrellaatbirminghamlgbt)

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What's On
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Boost your condom knowledge for Condom Week!

Do you know how to put a condom on correctly?

1



Check date and kitemarks.
Tear down from serrated
edge, taking care not to
damage the condom.

2



Squeeze the end of the
condom carefully and roll
down the penis making sure
not to trap air.

3



Use lots of water-based lube.
Condoms can break if you
don't use enough lube.

4



After coming, pull out whilst
still erect. Wrap in tissue and
throw in the bin.

Get free condoms in Stoke-on-Trent from
Gaylife or with a C-Card!

Visit www.lgbtstoke.co.uk



Coventry gay club closes down

Coventry gay venue Rainbows closed its doors for the final time on New Year's Day, marking the end of an era for the city's LGBT scene.

The venue, which opened in 1997, was one of the first of its kind in the city. The closure is due to the owners no longer being able to afford the operating costs.

Rainbows' status as Coventry's premier gay night spot has recently been challenged by The Yard, which opened last year.

Speaking to the Coventry Telegraph about the closure, Rainbows owner Terry Limmer said: "The running costs of £1,000 a day are no longer viable. Rainbows was the only LGBTQ venue for a long time in Coventry, but after 20 years we've decided to close.

"Personally I don't think Coventry is big enough for two venues, as other venues have opened and closed over the years. The Yard is new, and now it's their turn to serve Coventry's LGBTQ community. "Thank you to all the people who supported Rainbows for however long. We've made many amazing friends and met some real characters along the way (good and not so good), but you all made it what it is - was. So a final thank you to all the hardworking staff, DJs, performers and managers who were part of Rainbows. As the saying goes, we have lived, loved and laughed."



Peter Tatchell talks asylum

Veteran gay and human rights campaigner Peter Tatchell visits Birmingham's Ikon Gallery at the

end of the month to give a talk on how the asylum system is rigged against genuine refugees.

Refugee Detention: Britain's Shame sees Tatchell discussing the asylum process in detail, from

initial application through to incarceration, legal aid, tribunal hearings and deportations.

The event takes place on Wednesday 28 February. Booking is essential.



Have ya heard?



Birmingham Pride announces 'Be You' theme for 2018 festival

Organisers of Birmingham Pride have announced 'Be You' as its theme for this year's festival.

In the current climate, minority groups and communities are working hard against attempts to be marginalised by the mainstream. Across the wider world, people of all colours, gender, sexual identities and sexuality are 'finding their voice' and speaking out against the turning back of pro-LGBT legislation. This year's festival will be a celebration of the right to be who you are, to feel comfortable to express it, and celebrate individuality with Birmingham Pride using its historic 21st anniversary as a platform to celebrate, educate, inspire and raise funds.

Commenting on the announcement, Lawrence Barton, Festival Director, said: "This year's 'Be You' theme is significant in its timing and is an unashamed celebration of people's uniqueness, and their right to be who they are without fear of prejudice or hate - regardless of their gender, sexuality, colour, religion or sexual identity"

"As always, we've got a lot planned for Birmingham Pride 2018, as we watch the festival evolve and grow, making it bigger and better than in previous years, particularly as we celebrate our 21st anniversary in the city. The festival will look to encourage, celebrate, and, most of all, raise lots of money for local LGBT charities and causes."

Birmingham Pride 2018 takes place on Saturday 26 and Sunday 27 May in the heart of the city's gay village.

Meanwhile, Manchester Airport has pledged to continue its sponsorship of the festival's Cabaret Marquee for the next three years.

Premier League football player could be banned for homophobia

Premier League footballer Mason Holgate could face a ban after footy chiefs opened an investigation into homophobic tweets.

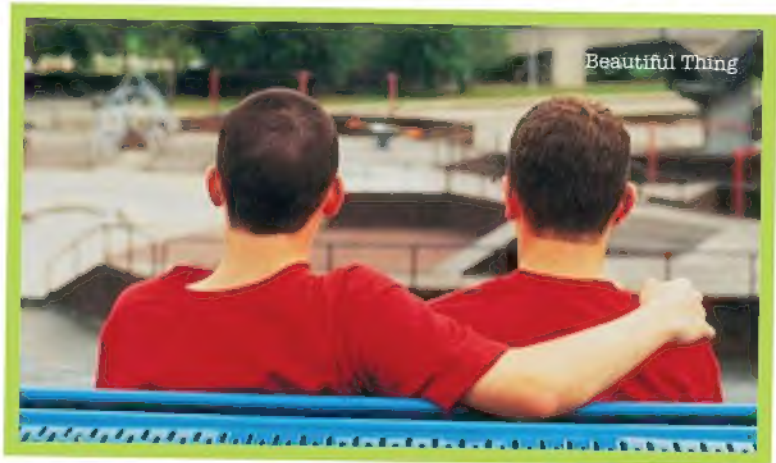
Defender Holgate, who currently plays for Everton, allegedly used the terms 'fag', 'fag-got', 'batty' and 'battyboy' in a series of tweets posted in 2012 and '13.

Football's governing body, the Football Association, is looking into the tweets, which surfaced following Holgate's on-pitch altercation with Liverpool striker Roberto Firmino earlier this month.

Once the homophobic tweets were discovered, Holgate deleted his Twitter account. Back in 2016, Premier League footballer Andre Gray was banned for four games over tweets that suggested gay people should 'burn' and 'die'.



Beautiful Thing to headline Brum LGBT History Festival



The Birmingham LGBT History Festival makes a welcome return this month.

The festival features a diverse programme of screenings, talks and other events, presented at venues across the city from Thursday 22 to Sunday 25 February.

The first Birmingham LGBT History Festival was held last year to mark the 50th anniversary of the 1967 Sexual Offences Act.

The event explores LGBT history, social histories, political activism and the ways in which communities have been represented on screen and in the media. The 2018 programme launches with a special archive screening of *Even Solomon* (the first example of a transgender character on British TV). It closes with a showing of classic movie *Beautiful Thing*, followed by an exclusive Q&A discussion with its creator, the playwright, author and screenwriter Jonathan Harvey.

As part of the festival, Birmingham LGBT is hosting *Outing The Past* at Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery. The free event sees speakers from across the UK sharing stories, uncovering forgotten histories and presenting new perspectives on LGBT history.

Adam Carver, the producer of SHOUT Festival, which is organising the event, said: "We're extremely proud to bring back the Birmingham LGBT History Festival for 2018 after such phenomenal feedback and interest from 2017. This year's programme is for people to come together, discuss and celebrate the diverse and varied heritage and histories of LGBT communities."

To find out more, visit shoutfestival.co.uk.

Drag Race star Katya postpones UK tour until 2019



RuPaul's Drag Race star Katya has announced that she's postponing her UK tour until 2019.

The star of the popular TV drag show posted the news on Twitter. Her statement read: "Hi, my name is not Katya. I am Brian, a recovering drug addict and workaholic. I need to take some personal time for my mental health to heal and recover."

"All of my tours have and shows will be postponed until

2019. Local venues will provide an update over the next several weeks.

"I love you all, and love is more powerful than money, and because this is 'online' I have to tell a joke so you know I'm serious: I still hate Taylor Swift."

She finished with: "Peace be with you".

Katya was due to visit Birmingham's New Alexandra Theatre on Monday 5 February.

Trade Sexual Health thank Leicester gay venues for World AIDS Day donation

Leicestershire's Trade Sexual Health has received a donation of £400 from two of Leicester's gay venues.

Rainbow & Dove and Dover Castle donated the profits from drinks sales during two World AIDS Day events that Trade hosted in the venues in December.

Commenting on the donation, Trade's Health Promotion & Volunteer Coordinator, Wlad Jagiello, said: "We rely on the generosity of our communities to enable us to continue providing information, support and services for LGBT people living and working in Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland.

"We're proud of great partnership work with the local venues and are grateful to the staff at both venues for supporting us." Venue manager Lukasz Zarzycki added: "Our bars are run with great understanding of community needs. It's great to offer good drinks and time out but also an opportunity for our clients to spend their money knowing that it's going to a good cause."

Have ya heard?

Britney Spears to headline Brighton Pride



Image by Chris Jepson

Global pop star Britney Spears is the first act to be announced by organisers of the annual Brighton Pride festival.

The 'Hit Me Baby One More Time' star will be debuting her 'Piece of Me' tour at the festival which takes place on Saturday 4 August.

Pride organisers announced the huge act on social media this morning, saying: "We are thrilled to announce that legendary pop icon Britney Spears will be the headline act for Brighton and Hove Pride on Saturday 4th August 2018!

"Brighton Pride will be the first place in Europe to see the global megastar on her 2018 tour performing her spectacular Las Vegas show 'Britney - Piece of Me'."

Tickets for Brighton Pride are now on sale, as organisers announce Colour My World as the theme for the 2018 edition of the event.

The theme was chosen as a homage to the rainbow flag's original eight colours of pink, red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet. These represent, respectively, sexuality, life, healing, sun, nature, art, harmony and spirit.

Tickets are available from pride-tickets.org.

Fame The Musical turns 30 and visits the Midlands as part of anniversary tour!



A 2018/19 30th anniversary tour of Fame The Musical will stop off in the Midlands.

The award-winning show visits Birmingham's New Alexandra Theatre later this year, from 19 to 24 November.

Commenting on the tour, David Hutchinson, Executive Creative Director of Selladoor, the company presenting the show, said: "This new tour celebrates the 30 years since the premiere of the production and will very much have its roots in the style and nostalgia of the original musical.

"Selladoor are dedicated to bringing large-scale theatre to as broad an audience as possible across the UK and internationally, and we're delighted to add another classic musical to our ever-growing portfolio."

The tour ends in 2019 at Shrewsbury's Theatre Severn, where its opening night is Monday 28 January.

Local Life Story

Name: Richard Easter

Occupation: Owner of The Yard, Coventry

Place of birth: Coventry

Star sign: Cancer

Age: 37

About Richard

Where did you grow up?

In the town of Kenilworth, just outside Leamington Spa.

Single or attached?

Attached.

What makes you happy?

Visiting new places, eating out (especially Thai food) and drinking gin.

What makes you sad?

Other people's ignorance and losing touch with friends. As life gets busier, you don't have as much time as you'd like to spend with them.

What makes you angry?

Intolerant and narrow-minded people. The world would be a much brighter place if people accepted that each person is different in their own special way.

If you could change one thing about yourself, what would it be?

I have two left feet when it comes to dancing and would love to be able to change this (it might be a difficult task, though!).

What's been the most embarrassing thing you've done in your life?

There's a few to choose from! My first business was an internet café in Kenilworth. I was desperate for publicity for it - they say all publicity is good publicity, after all - so I joined up with a hypnotist for a show there one night. To help promote the night, we invited the press along to watch me get hypnotised and have someone stand on me as I formed a human plank. In hindsight, I should've foreseen this, but the headline alongside my photo in the following week's paper was 'Café boss thought he was a plank'!

Would you consider getting married in the future?

Having been previously married in a same-sex relationship, it isn't something I would rush into, but yes, I would do it again.

Coming Out

When did you first know you were gay?

I had an inkling from an early age, but I think I knew for sure around the age of 15.

When did you come out?

At a Sixth Form leavers' ball when I was 17.

What was school like for you as a gay teenager?

It was a confusing time of my life,



and I felt out of place and isolated at times.

Who was the first person you told you were gay, and what was their reaction?

My friend, Isla. She didn't believe me and thought I was winding her up at first! She was incredibly supportive, though, and really helped me to accept myself and come out to other people.

What would you say to a youngster trying to come to terms with their own sexuality?

It's a confusing time of your life, but things do get better. Believe in yourself and be strong. Talking to people really does help, and there are some great support groups out there which allow you to meet new friends who're going through exactly the same thing. As someone once told me, there is glitter at the end of the tunnel!

Have you ever had any experiences with the opposite sex?

I've had a few girlfriends in the past but nothing too serious.

The Yard

What's your role at The Yard in Coventry?

I'm the owner and opened it in June 2017 after many months of planning. Having lived local to Coventry, I felt there was a need for a fresh new venue

Quickfire

Who's your favourite actor?

Leslie Nielson.

What's your favourite book?

Empire Of The Sun.

Half empty or half full?

Always half full.

What's your favourite food?

Thai (the spicier the better).

And how about your favourite drink?

Gin, gin and more gin!

Madonna or Lady Gaga?

Lady Gaga.

If you could take a selfie with one person, alive or dead, who would it be?

The Queen.

that would help rejuvenate the LGBT scene, and I was keen for this to be located right in the city centre.

What are the challenges?

Being only the second LGBT venue to open in Coventry in the past 20 years, the initial challenge was to convince people that they were safe to be themselves in The Yard, and that as a venue we were there to support them.

What are the highlights?

There really have been too many to list. We've had some great acts appear, both for our weekly cabaret nights and also for our Big Saturday nights, but I think the real highlight for me has been seeing The Yard welcomed so quickly into the local community.

What are your future plans for The Yard?

To continue to grow what we've started and bring some of the best cabaret and live acts into Coventry. We're also working very closely now with Coventry Pride to help support this year's event and make it the best yet. As the date of this year's Pride event - the 9th and 10th of June - coincides with The Yard's first birthday, we're planning a huge weekend.

How does The Yard help the LGBT community?

I feel it's really important to help support the local LGBT community and to hold regular fundraising events. We recently held a fundraiser for a local charity called Prism, and not only did that help to raise over £500 for them, it also raised general awareness of the great work that they do. In addition to fundraising, we also make the venue available free of charge for local LGBT organisations to use.

Where do you see yourself in five years' time?

I'd like to think that I'll have been able to find the time to finally complete my private pilot's licence and be able to enjoy flying in my spare time.

Gay Scene

How long have you been frequenting the Midlands gay scene?

Since the age of 18.

What's been your fondest memory of the scene?

Attending my first Gay Pride in Birmingham in 1998. I was overwhelmed by its scale and friendliness.

Who's your favourite cabaret act on the scene?

Miss Marty. She was one of the first cabaret acts I got to know.

Who's your favourite person on the scene?

I don't think I have one person in particular, but I do have great admiration for everyone who devotes their time to putting on Pride events each year. A huge amount of unseen work is needed to organise them.

What do you most enjoy about the scene?

Definitely the music. I think the gay scene has some of the best music and DJs around.

What have you noticed about the way the scene's changed over the years?

It's become much more diverse - we're welcoming more and more straight people into it. I certainly don't think this is a bad thing, as it's hopefully helping to break down barriers and change perceptions.

How would you change the scene?

I don't think the scene necessarily needs to change, but it does need to continue to evolve, to reflect the diverse range of customers it now attracts.

Time Out

Where do you like to go on a night out?

Obviously The Yard! I also enjoy going out for dinner, trying new restaurants and styles of food.



What do you do to relax?

Spend time on my boat. It's moored in a marina in Napton on the Oxford canal and is the perfect place to escape to.

What do you enjoy on telly?

EastEnders, The Simpsons and documentaries such as 24 Hours In A&E.

What was the last track or album you bought or downloaded?

I haven't bought a track for a long time, but the last one I downloaded was Perfect by Ed Sheeran.

Which one website do you spend the most time on?

Facebook.

What type of holiday do you prefer?

Short sightseeing breaks are my favourite at the moment. I love the fact that you can squeeze so much into just a few days and see so many new things.

The Top 5 Finalists

After more than 8,700 votes were cast in Part One of the Readers' Awards, we're pleased to announce your top five finalists in each category. Online voting has now re-opened so that you can vote for your winner! Voting will continue right the way through until 28 February. All previous votes will be added to the new votes cast. Make sure you pick up a copy of the April issue of Midlands Zone, because that's where you'll see all of your winners! In the meantime, get voting now at midlandszone.co.uk

Best Birmingham Gay Nightclub

Top 5 Finalists:

- Bar Jester
- Boltz
- Club Chic
- Glamorous
- The Nightingale

Best Midlands Gay Nightclub (outside B'ham)

Top 5 Finalists:

- Gorgeous - Wolverhampton
- Gossip - Stoke-On-Trent
- Helsinki - Leicester
- The Lion - Walsall
- The Yard - Coventry

Best Birmingham Gay Bar

Top 5 Finalists:

- Eden
- The Loft
- Missing
- Sidewalk
- The Village Inn

Best Midlands Gay Bar (outside Birmingham)

Top 5 Finalists:

- Dover Castle - Leicester
- The Lion - Walsall
- Rainbow & Dove - Leicester
- The Red Lion - Walsall
- The Yard - Coventry

Best Midlands Community Gay Bar

Top 5 Finalists:

- Dover Castle - Leicester
- Eden - Birmingham
- The Fox - Birmingham
- The Wellington - Birmingham
- The Yard - Coventry

Best Midlands Cafe Bar / Restaurant

Top 5 Finalists:

- The Loft - Birmingham
- Rainbow & Dove - Leicester
- Sidewalk - Birmingham
- The Wellington - Birmingham
- The Yard - Coventry

Best Midlands Bar/Club for Men

Top 5 Finalists:

- Boltz - Birmingham
- The Core - Birmingham
- Eden - Birmingham
- The Fountain Inn - Birmingham
- The Lion - Walsall

Best Midlands Bar/Club for Women

Top 5 Finalists:

- The Fox - Birmingham
- Gorgeous - Wolverhampton
- Gossip - Stoke-on-Trent
- The Nightingale - Birmingham
- Sidewalk - Birmingham

Best Midlands Venue Outdoor Area

Top 5 Finalists:

- Eden - Birmingham
- Gossip - Stoke-On-Trent
- The Lion - Walsall
- The Loft - Birmingham
- The Village Inn - Birmingham

Best Midlands New Venue / Refurb

Top 5 Finalists:

- Bar Diva - Dudley
- Glamorous - Birmingham
- Gossip - Stoke-On-Trent
- Rhapsody - Birmingham
- The Yard - Coventry

Best Midlands venue Front of House Team

Top 5 Finalists:

- Dover Castle - Leicester
- Eden - Birmingham
- The Fox - Birmingham
- The Nightingale - Birmingham
- The Village Inn - Birmingham

Best Midlands venue Security Team

Top 5 Finalists:

- Eden - Birmingham
- Gossip - Stoke-On-Trent
- The Village Inn - Birmingham
- Missing - Birmingham
- The Nightingale - Birmingham

Best OVERALL Birmingham Venue

Top 5 Finalists:

- Eden
- The Loft
- Missing
- The Nightingale
- The Village Inn

Best OVERALL Midlands Venue (outside Birmingham)

Top 5 Finalists:

- Dover Castle - Leicester
- Gorgeous - Wolverhampton
- Gossip - Stoke on Trent
- The Lion - Walsall
- The Yard - Coventry

Best Midlands Venue One-Nighter

Top 5 Finalists:

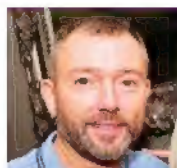
- BearBrum
- @ Eden - Birmingham
- Birmingham Fetish Men
- @ Eden - Birmingham
- Glittersh!l
- @ The Nightingale - Birmingham
- Saathi
- @ The Nightingale - Birmingham
- XXL
- @ The Core Club - Birmingham

Best Midlands Live Entertainment venue

Top 5 Finalists:

- Dover Castle - Leicester
- Eden - Birmingham
- Glamorous - Birmingham
- The Nightingale - Birmingham
- The Village Inn - Birmingham

Scene Personality of the Year



■ Garry Prentice



■ Lawrence Barton



■ Miss Penny



■ Amy LaQueefa

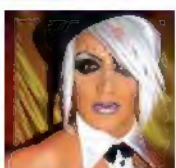


■ Andy King

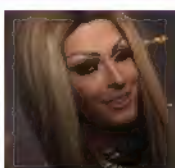
Best Compere/Host in the Midlands



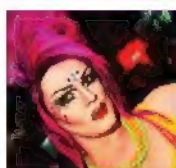
■ Miss Penny



■ Marty Smith



■ Destiny Dyson



■ Charlotte the Harlot



■ Queeny

DON'T FORGET!

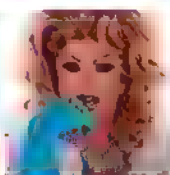
You can still nominate your favourite people for

- Youth Achievement
- Outstanding Contribution
- Lifetime Achievement

Best Cabaret Act in the Midlands



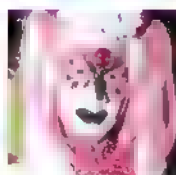
■ Marty



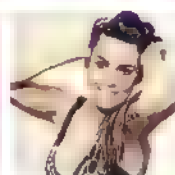
■ Miss Penny



■ Laqueefa



■ Twiggy

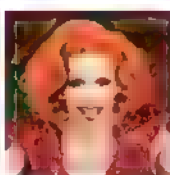


■ Vicky Jackson

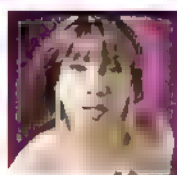
Best National Cabaret Act



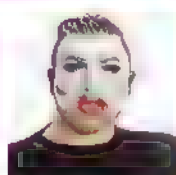
■ La Voix



■ Mary Mac



■ Sandra

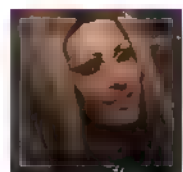


■ Danny Beard

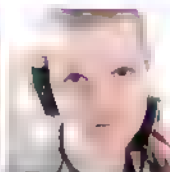


■ Charlie Hides

Best Midlands Bar DJ



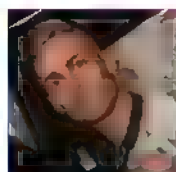
■ Destiny Dyson
- Gossip



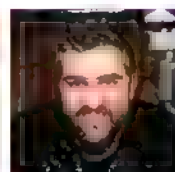
■ Deano Trickett
- The Village Inn



■ Mike Emery
- Missing



■ Richard Moon
- The Village Inn



■ Toni Lee
- Eden

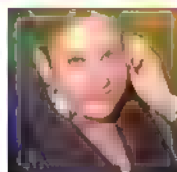
Best Midlands Club DJ



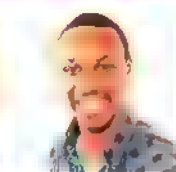
■ Rob Lambeth
- Helsinki



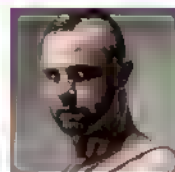
■ Robbie Lewis
- The Nightingale



■ Corey Hadley
- The Nightingale



■ Shaun Baxter
- Gorgeous



■ Paul Morrell
- XXL (The Core)

Best Front of House Person

Top 5 Finalists

- Ollie Betts - Missing
- Garry Prentice - Eden
- Hilli Fletcher - The Fox
- Sara McEnery - The Yard
- Stephen Lambert - Missing

Best Security Person

Top 5 Finalists

- Carl Cino - Gossip
- Steve Barrett - Eden
- Wayne Turner - Missing
- Janine Webb - The Yard
- Kevin Mulligan - The Nightingale

Best Midlands Pride Event

Top 5 Finalists

- Birmingham Pride
- Coventry Pride
- Leicester Pride
- Stoke-On-Trent Pride
- Walsall Pride

Best Midlands LGBT Event

Top 5 Finalists

- L Fest, Staffordshire
- Picnic in the Park, Birmingham
- Pride In Sport, Birmingham
- Rainbow Film Festival, S'bury
- SHOUT Festival, Birmingham

Best LGBT Charity Group of Achievement

Top 5 Finalists

- Birmingham LGBT (Umbrella)
- Coventry & Warks Friend
- Positive West Midlands
- Terrence Higgins Trust
- Trade Sexual Health

Best LGBT Sport or Social Group

Top 5 Finalists

- Acting Out
- BGSO
- Birmingham Blaze FC
- Birmingham Bulls RFC
- Birmingham Swifts

Best Midlands Health Club / Sauna

Top 5 Finalists

- CS2 - Nottingham
- The Greenhouse - Darlaston
- Splash - Leicester
- Spartan - Birmingham
- Unit 2 - Birmingham

Best LGBT-Friendly Online or Retail Store

Top 5 Finalists

- Bang & Stirke - Online
- Clonezone - Birmingham
- John Lewis - Birmingham
- Harvey Nichols - Birmingham
- Selfridges - Birmingham



To enter the free prize draw for £1,000, simply VOTE and then complete our **Readership Survey** and we'll select a lucky winner at random!

VOTE ONLINE AT: www.midlandszone.co.uk

New Service Launch
Well Woman Sexual Health Clinic
Exclusively for Lesbian, Bisexual and Queer Women

Opening at Birmingham LGBT
on 7th February 2018

Runs on the 1st Wednesday of each month from 4pm–7pm
Offering a range of services including testing and treatment for
STI's and cervical cytology (smear testing).

Providing a safe, confidential and culturally competent service
which makes no assumptions about your sex life.

www.blgbt.org/sexual-health
Tel: 0121 643 0821



Birmingham LGBT

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Get tested from home for STIs including HIV.
Order your free kit now: umbrellahealth.co.uk/testing

Well Woman Clinic

Birmingham LGBT this month launches a new sexual health clinic for LBQ Women

What is the Well Woman Clinic?

On Wednesday 7 February, Birmingham LGBT, in partnership with Umbrella sexual health services, will open its doors to the Well Woman Clinic, a dedicated sexual health & wellbeing clinic specifically for lesbian, bisexual and queer women.

The clinic will run on the first Wednesday of every month, from 4pm to 7pm.

The new initiative will offer a range of professionally delivered clinical services. These will be NHS nurse-led and supported by Birmingham LGBT's dedicated Lesbian & Bisexual Women's Outreach Worker.

The clinic will provide a space for lesbian, bisexual and queer women to access:

STI and HIV testing

STI treatment

One-to-one advice & support

Cervical cytology (smear testing)

Free dams, gloves, condoms and lube

Access & referral to a range of other services

The clinic is a FREE, CONFIDENTIAL, accessible space for all women who identify as LBQ+ or have sex with other women.

Why is this service needed?

Sexual health services have often sidelined lesbian, bisexual and queer women. This has meant that many feel unable to access the health & wellbeing services they may need. It has also perpetuated the myth that LBQ+ sex is risk-free.

Alongside this, many LBQ+ women have reported that their sexual orientation and sexual practice has been presumed or misunderstood by healthcare professionals, making it difficult to access correct and adequate support.

Lu Skerratt, Birmingham LGBT's Lesbian & Bisexual Women's Outreach Worker, said: "Here at Birmingham LGBT we are proud to be helping level out the health inequalities faced by LBQ+ women through the Well Woman Clinic. I'm really enthusiastic about my role and can't wait to get stuck in."

As well as supporting NHS clinical staff to facilitate the Well Woman Clinic, Lu's role also includes promoting, educating, supporting and encouraging women to access sexual health & wellbeing services, both at the LGBT Centre and out and about on outreach.

Lu also provides lesbian, bisexual and queer women with access to one-to-one support and can facilitate direct referral into other services where needed. Through identifying and challenging the real or perceived barriers that lesbian, bisexual and queer women may face when accessing healthcare, she is able to provide LBQ+ women with the support, information and advice relevant to their specific sexual health needs.



Could this be the most romantic couple in the Midlands? David Nash and Peter Wright have recently wed.



Love is in the air!

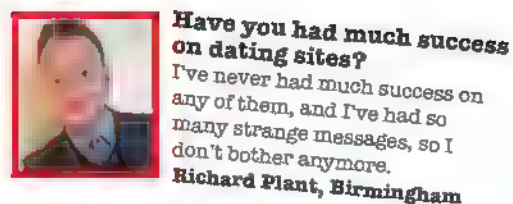
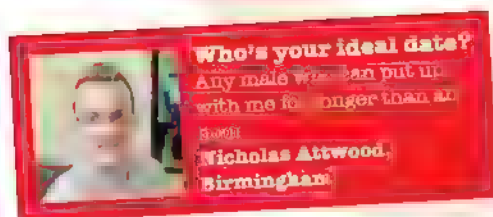


Although it could be argued that you shouldn't need a particular day on which to show your love for your partner, Valentine's Day does provide a useful opportunity to reboot your relationship if things have been less than ideal during the previous 12 months.

Weather-wise a usually cold and bleak day, the 14th of February sees lovebirds of all persuasions attempting to warm the cockles of their partner's heart by spending a small fortune on numerous gifts or a memorable night out with hopefully a happy ending to come once you've jumped into bed together. Of course, if you're unhappily

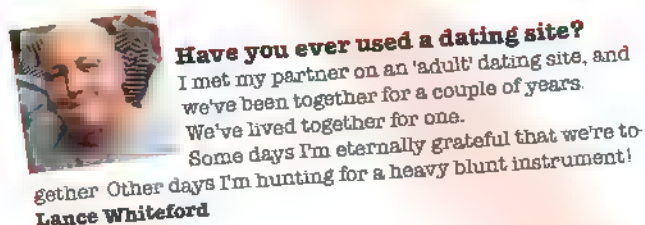
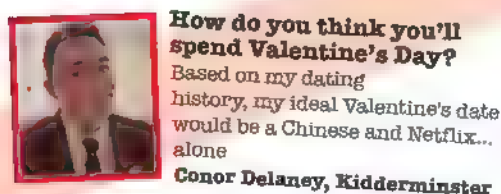
single, the sight of loved-up couples celebrating their relationship could be more than enough to see you heading to your local gay bar to join the rest of the singletons in wishing the day away! Anyway, if you do have a partner and a relationship that matters to you, check out our handy guide to Valentine's Day over the next few pages. From

a gift guide to help you spice up your love life, to suggestions for unusual dates to enjoy at venues across the Midlands, we hope to give you some serious food for romantic thought. Regardless of whether or not you have someone with whom to share Valentine's Day, all of us here at Midlands Zone wish you all the love in the world. We love you!

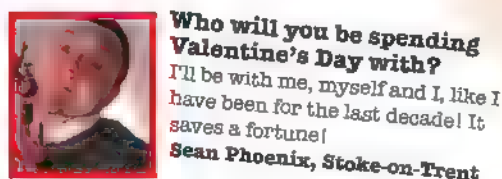


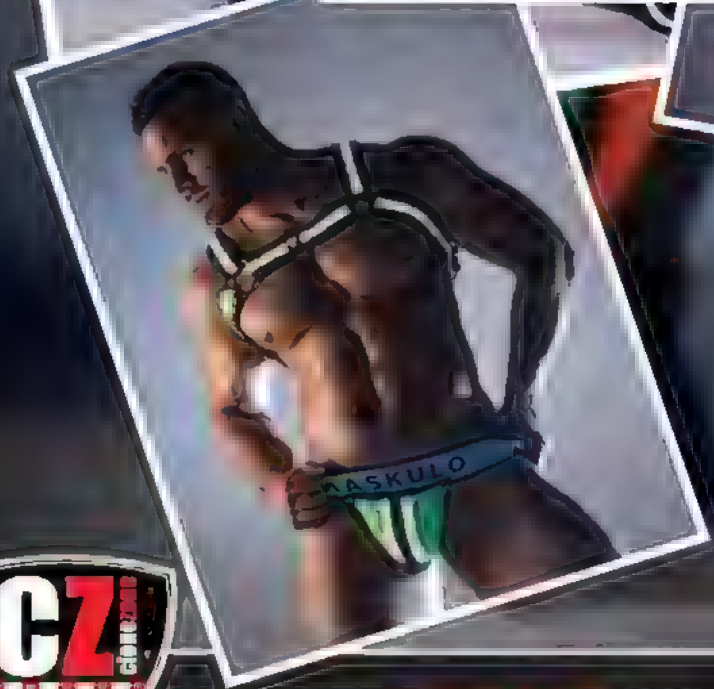
It's a Date!

We ask you about your ideal date, your opinions on dating websites and how you'll be spending the 14th of February...



Who would you like to go out on a date with?
Emma Willis. Claire from Steps. Holly Willoughby. Dinner for two. A girl can dream. In reality, I've got the best woman on the planet, so all is good in the world. Or dinner for four and I'll have them all!
Lisa Bennett, Birmingham





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SPICE UP YOUR LIFE!

Spicy products to excite your partner this Valentine's Day!



MASKULO Extreme Racer Singlet ▼
with Rear Zipper

Could you ever have imagined that mixing wrestling, disco and fetish could be sexy? Neither could we but how wrong we were! This extreme racer wrestling singlet from Maskulo gives you comfort, support and maximum sex appeal. Featuring an internal panel that stretches to a round neck, the singlet has open sides which help keep you cool and exposed. The whole piece is topped off with a rear zipper, meaning you can choose between being modest or being peachy and easily accessible.

£89.99
clonezone.co.uk

Nexus ACE Remote-controlled ►
Vibrating Butt Plug

This large, luxurious butt plug is made from silky soft silicone, with stimulation ribs at the base that deliver tingling sensations whether the plug is vibrating or not. The remote control can be used up to eight metres away and can also be controlled by a button on the base. At that distance, the Ace is the ideal toy for wearing when out and about. The plug is super-quiet, meaning you can give your partner a buzz when he least expects it, maybe from across the room as part of his public submission training!

£69.99
clonezone.co.uk



Fetish Gear H-Front Harness ►

Smooth and shiny leather in sleek black is detailed with fetish colour-coded metal work. Includes four fully adjustable buckles, two D-rings and crisp finishing.

£89.99
clonezone.co.uk

**Cell Block 13 Velocity
Rubber-look Jock Strap** ▼

Wear something different in the bedroom for a spicier night! This orange and black Cell Block 13 jock strap will certainly get you and your partner hot and ready for a fun night in!

£29.99
clonezone.co.uk



Titus Silicone Puppy-tail Butt Plug ▼

This puppy-tail butt plug from the Titus range at Clonezone has been designed to satisfy your urge to be on your knees, wag your tail and beg for affection. The wagging tail is made from supple silicone material, meaning it wobbles from side-to-side AND up and down whichever way the excitable pup is moving.

£14.99
clonezone.co.uk



STUD Argonaut Chest & Body Harness ►

The full-body harness features a crossover star-shaped upper chest, leading to under the armpit, over the shoulder, across the sides of the chest and around your bulge and behind straps. Sounds complex, doesn't it? Well... being simple is boring.

£27.99
clonezone.co.uk



STUD Argonaut Chest & Body Harness ▼

When you slip this over your head, you're no longer a bi-pedal human. Instead, you're transformed into one of the cutest, waggiest pups out there. The neoprene is soft and stretchy, so it feels great, and there are no zippers or any lacing to mess with. The body of the hood is all black with black top stitching. Textured black neoprene for the brow, muzzle and inner ears lets you show off your unique puppy personality. The muzzle is removable, so you can gnaw on that bone or grab a glass of water without ever needing to leave that puppy headspace.

£89.99
clonezone.co.uk

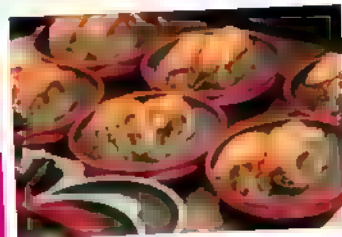
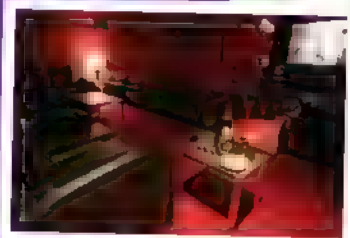


Dating Differently

It's Valentine's Day this month and love is in the air - but what can you do if you really want to impress your date? How about trying something a little different from the conventional 'romantic meal, box of chocolates and bottle of wine' approach? Zone's put together six of the best alternative Valentine's options for lovers looking to spice up their dating experience...

The Electric Cinema

Now a second time round, the Electric Cinema in Birmingham is the UK's oldest working cinema. Not only that, you can choose from a selection of sofas to snuggle up on, there's a bar serving alcoholic drinks and even a waiter service available. On Valentine's Day, the cinema is screening ultimate chick flick *The Notebook* and the Quentin Tarantino penned film *Reservoir Dogs*.
www.theelectriccinema.co.uk



YO! Sushi sushi school

Sample a new and different season in and see how to make your own. The freshest ingredients have a go at preparing. You'll learn all the different types of sushi and everything you'll need to make your own. Suitable for 2000 - 10,000 to 1000. Places at £150 per person or £80 for two. Contact your local YO! to book a class.

Kitty Cafe

A cat lover's heaven. We're talking about the most legged animal in the house. The Kitty Cafe is a cat lover's dream. It's a place where you can enjoy the company of cats and dogs. The cafe is a great place to relax and enjoy the company of cats and dogs. www.kittycats.co.uk



Escape Live!

You have 60 minutes to complete a mountain of puzzles and mysteries. The aim is simple: get out before it's too late. With various, different rooms to choose from, including Prison Break and Dr Wilson's Office, can you and your partner take on the challenge? £22pp based on a two-player game.
www.escapelive.co.uk



Ghetto Golf

Based in Birmingham, Ghetto Golf features a seriously sweet 6-hole mini-golf experience. A great outdoor bar, green food and beer. And at just £10 a go, you can't go wrong.
www.ghetogolf.co.uk



Bounce Below

Bounce Below is a fun, indoor, trampolining and climbing centre. It's a place where you can have a great time. The centre is a great place to relax and enjoy the company of cats and dogs. www.bouncebelow.co.uk

SAT 26 & SUN 27 MAY 2018

BIRMINGHAM

pride
2018

For our 21st anniversary Birmingham Pride's theme will be

#BeYou

Get your discounted 'EARLY BUY' tickets now from www.birminghampride.com

Going places...

If you love to travel and explore new places, check out our top picks of LGBT-friendly European cities - perfect for that much-deserved city break with your other half...



Dublin

Flights from Birmingham from £94pp*

Ireland made waves in 2015 when, for the first time,

the country became the first in Europe to legalise same-sex marriage. It's a testament to the country's progressive values and its welcoming attitude towards the LGBT community.

near-nightly bus



Barcelona

Flights from Birmingham from £150pp*

Barcelona is a vibrant city with a rich cultural heritage. It's known for its stunning architecture, including the works of Antoni Gaudí. The city is also a hub for the LGBT community, with a thriving scene in the Eixample district.



Paris

Flights from Birmingham from £150pp*

Paris is a city of romance and art. It's a place where you can stroll through the Louvre Museum or enjoy a picnic in the Bois de Boulogne. The city is also known for its vibrant LGBT scene, particularly in the Marais district.



Rome

Flights from Birmingham from £155pp*

Rome is a city of history and culture. It's a place where you can explore the ruins of ancient Rome or enjoy a delicious Italian meal. The city is also known for its vibrant LGBT scene, particularly in the Trastevere district.

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www.thepeachtree.co.uk



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including a glass of Prosecco

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www.havanarepublic.co.uk

Cosy night in?

If you're on a budget this Valentine's Day, or you maybe just fancy spending the night in, then check out these great LGBT-themed movies we think you might enjoy...



Carol (Cert 15)

Carol is a 2015 American romantic drama film directed by Todd Haynes, based on the 1952 novel of the same name by Patricia Highsmith. The film stars Cate Blanchett and Rooney Mara as two women who fall in love in 1950s New York City. The film is a beautiful and powerful story of love and acceptance, and it's a must-watch for anyone who loves LGBT-themed movies.



Blue Is the Warmest Colour (Cert 15)

Blue Is the Warmest Colour is a 2013 French romantic drama film directed by Céline Sciamma. The film tells the story of two young women who fall in love in Paris. The film is a beautiful and powerful story of love and acceptance, and it's a must-watch for anyone who loves LGBT-themed movies.



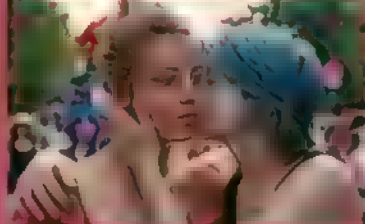
God's Own Country (Cert 15)

God's Own Country is a 2017 British romantic drama film directed by Francis Lee. The film tells the story of two men who fall in love in a rural setting. The film is a beautiful and powerful story of love and acceptance, and it's a must-watch for anyone who loves LGBT-themed movies.



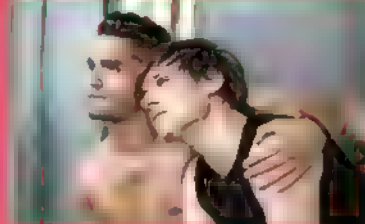
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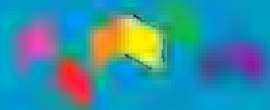
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Birmingham LGBT

Take part in Fitness February,
a month-long programme of free
taster sessions and activities,
offering something every single
day for you to try

FITNESS FEBRUARY AT BIRMINGHAM LGBT

- **karate**
- **roller derby**
- **fencing**
- **indoor climbing**
- **line dancing**
- **bollywood dancing**
- **badminton**
- **tennis**
- **kettlebells**
- **cricket**
- **bowling**
- **running**
- **swimming**
- **yoga**
- **walking**
- **rugby**
- **water polo**
- **volleyball**
- **table tennis**
- **tennis**

Full details of sessions and booking
at www.blgbt.org/fitfeb or **phone**
0121 643 0821. You can also follow
a [birminghamlgbt](#) for updates

#FitFebBrum



FITNESS FEBRUARY

A great way to introduce yourself to new activities...

Throughout February and as part of LGBT History month, award-winning charity Birmingham LGBT is running a varied programme of sporting activities, offering community members the chance to try out something new!

The Fitness February programme offers taster experiences of both traditional and not so traditional activities, all of which are available as part of Birmingham LGBT's commitment to healthy lifestyles and improved wellbeing.

Featuring something for everyone, regardless of age, ability or gender, the free taster programme might well inspire you to take up a new hobby and meet some new people.

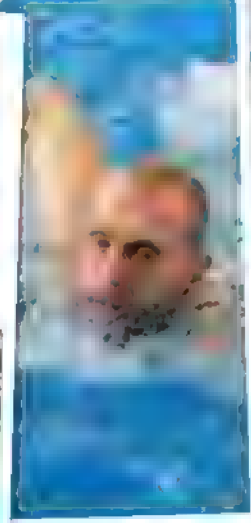
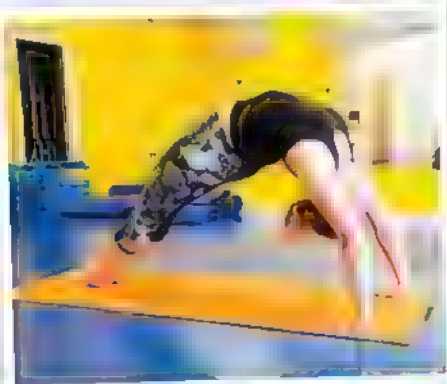
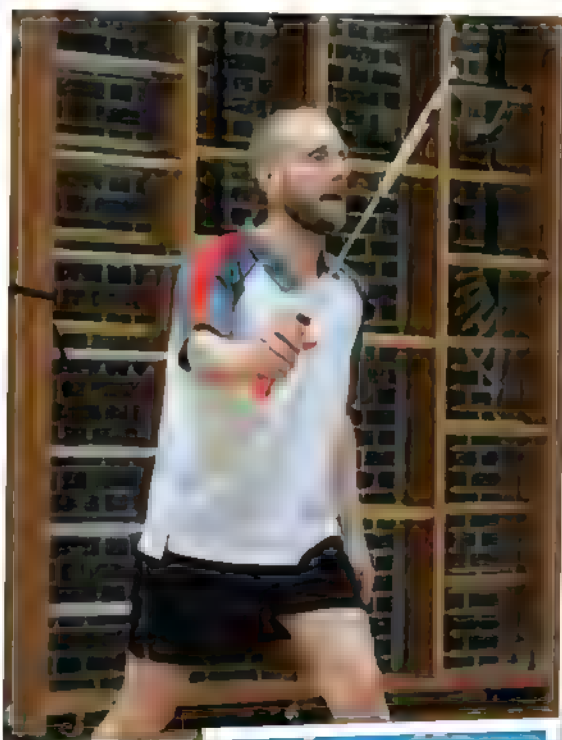
- Water polo
- Aerobics
- Pilates
- Table tennis
- Triathlon

If you're interested in trying out something new...

...Plan your month at blgbt.org/fitfeb and follow @birminghamlgbt #FitFebBum for updates, email activate@blgbt.org or call Birmingham LGBT on 0121 643 0821.

Please be aware that some events operate on a maximum capacity basis, meaning that Birmingham LGBT is operating an online ticketing system - so be sure to book before it's too late!

- Ballet
- Karate
- Roller derby
- Fencing
- Indoor climbing
- Line dancing
- Bollywood dancing
- Football
- Boxercise
- Kettlebells
- Circuits
- Badminton
- Running
- Swimming
- Yoga
- Walking
- Rugby



Pictures by Nick Hynan

MidlandsZone.co.uk 25



GETTING IN A FLAP!

Steve Ball talks to Midlands Zone about Penguins, a new LGBT-friendly show about two 'gay' penguins that's coming to the Birmingham Rep this month...

Why Penguins, Steve?

I've always been fascinated by the true story of Roy and Silo, two chinstrap penguins at New York City's Central Park Zoo, who bonded as a couple and tried to hatch a rock as if it were an egg. On noticing this, the zookeeper gave them a spare egg from another couple that subsequently hatched. The baby penguin, Tango, and her two dads achieved celebrity status when the story was told in the New York Times in May 2004. It caught my imagination as being a story that could be brought to life on stage.

Who's making the show?

It's an international collaboration. We have a director from Northern Ireland, a French designer and a Spanish choreographer. Penguins is directed by Paul Bosco McEneaney, founder and artistic director of Belfast children's theatre company Cahoots NI, who've gained an international reputation for creating magical theatrical experiences for young audiences. It's choreographed by Carlos Pons Guerra, founder of DeNada Dance Theatre, who's created lots of cutting edge dance, much of which has explored LGBT themes.

Who's the show for?

It's for everyone, but it's been made with young children aged from three to seven in mind. It's a family show, though, so will appeal to adults too.

Why is the show important?

First of all, it's going to be a great piece of dance theatre that will entertain and captivate audiences. But it's also a celebration of different types of families and provides a safe space to explore and celebrate family relationships and diversity. There are very few examples of theatre for children that offer these opportunities in a way that's child friendly in its simplicity and focus on story. Ultimately, this production is about love within a family, which is something all children should relate to.

As they grow up, children will meet, work and live alongside people who're different to them, and as they watch Penguins they'll be transported to a world where difference isn't questioned; it just is. No one questions the two male penguins who fall in love, and no one questions their desire to have a child. It's very timely because the government has confirmed that from September 2019, all schools in England will be required by law to teach Relationship & Sex Education which must include reference to same-sex relationships.

When is Penguins on and how do we get tickets to see it?

Catch it at The REP from 1 to 10 February. For tickets, call The REP's box office on 0121 236 4455 or book online at birmingham-rep.co.uk

Zone columnist Steve Ball is Associate Director at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre and Birmingham Hippodrome.





Stephen Bailey

The comedian brings his
Can't Think Straight
tour to the Midlands

Potty-mouthed comedian Stephen Bailey may not be a household name, but he's certainly coming up fast on the tracks. Having supported Katherine Ryan and Jenny Eclair on sell-out UK tours, he's now hitting the road with his own show, Can't Think Straight. Describing himself as 'a working-class, ginger, gay, northern comic', Stephen has a black belt in Tae Kwon-Do. He also freely admits to loving a conspiracy theory - preferably one involving a celebrity and a cucumber...

When did you decide you were funny?

Well, I still don't know if I've figured that out, to be honest. I was quite a shy person, but when I moved to London, I decided I had to come out of my shell because I didn't know anyone there at the time. So I joined a creative writing course. Someone there said that I should do stand-up comedy because they thought I was quite funny when one-to-one. So that's how that happened.

When and where was your first ever comedy gig?

It was in 2011 in a room above a pub in Leicester Square. It only had 20 people in, but it was so small that 20 people meant it had sold out. I just did a lot of material comparing my housemate's vagina to a Sunday roast. It went really well.

Who was the funniest person you knew growing up?

Oh, it still is my mum. She's ridiculous. She comes out with lots of 'mum-isms'. The stuff about her in my show, I don't have to edit it. I just say it as it is.

Who's been your biggest inspiration?

That's a tough question! When I was growing up, I watched Popstars: The Rivals and saw Girls Aloud go from little chubby chavs to pop princesses. I wanted that to happen to me. So yeah, Girls Aloud.

Is there a place and time where you're most creative?

Every time when I want my brain to shut off! Last year, I wrote my Edinburgh Fringe show whilst I was on holiday in July, and I was performing it in August. It was very last minute, but it was brilliant. It's this tour show I'm doing now. I find that when I'm supposed to be switched off is when I'm actually at my best - everywhere that you don't have a notepad or your phone to make notes - like when I'm on the toilet, or in the shower, or when I'm in the pool on holiday. You can guarantee that the minute my phone dies, I'll come up with about 10 brilliant ideas, and I'll have to recite them in my head until I get a phone charger.

You're heading out on your first solo tour. What excites you the most about this, and what are your concerns?

Let me tell you, my bowels haven't been the same since I agreed to this tour. I'm very excited because the show went really well at the Edinburgh Fringe and when I supported Katherine Ryan. I keep thinking that it's going to be great, but I'm concerned about whether anybody is going to come.

"Gay people still feel on the fringe and we still don't feel fully accepted. We still don't feel comfortable holding hands with their partner on the street."

The tour is called Can't Think Straight. Why can't you?

Because I don't know what straight people are thinking nowadays. Let's look at politics, for example. Straight people are in charge and it's not working out for me. I think behind every straight person, there's a brilliant gay best friend and they make great decisions. So I think they need to run the world if they're ever given the opportunity to.

Your comedy provides a platform from which you can talk about LGBT rights. If you could influence any one piece of LGBT legislation, which would it be?

Oh my god, that's a tough question! Do you

know what I'd like? My friend said this to me the other day. With a lot of things in the law, we've pretty much got equality. It's just in the societal sphere that we don't feel equal. Gay people still feel on the fringes and not fully accepted. We still don't feel comfortable holding hands with our partner in the street. I may have a white straight man telling me it's fine to be gay now - thank you for that insight, Richard Hammond - but it won't be until someone feels safe to hold their partner's hand in the street, without actually thinking about it, that people will be able to stop marching and talking about it. I've tried to write articles for the Guardian or the Metro and they just won't take them. But if the articles were about race or feminism, they absolutely would. Once again it's straight people telling us that everything's fine for us now and we don't need to feel that way.

What makes you 'everyone's gay best friend'?

I don't know! That was a quote about me in a review. When I'm on stage I'm very sassy and very roasty. I'm surprised people leave my shows even wanting to be my best friend. I think sometimes, especially with girls and gays, I go after straight men so much that I think maybe people like the flip of power or something. For someone who can't think straight, I can talk straight. I'm very straight-talking. I hate doing the things that people think a gay best friend loves. I don't want to sit and do your makeup, I don't want to go shopping. I certainly don't want to talk about your troubles. I want to talk about mine, and I don't want to be your sidekick.

What's been your most memorable gig?

Well, the best gig I've done, being a Manchester boy, was when I opened for Katherine Ryan at The Lowry in Salford. I was able to do proper local material about growing up in the area. It was brilliant because there were so many people. The reaction was great because it made me feel like I could do it forever. That was a nice feeling. But the opposite was my fourth ever gig, where I was really nervous. I'd drunk three bottles of wine before I went on stage, thinking it would calm my nerves. It was at this prestigious venue in London, the Comedy Café. I walked on stage and fell

into the microphone, which fell into the audience. By the time I'd reset the stage, I had, like, a minute left of my set!

How important is celebrity and fame?

I always joke about being famous, but I just want to be successful. Last year I managed to book two holidays thanks to being a comedian. That was brilliant, it meant I was living a normal life from doing my

and died. They'd kept it so secret that you weren't prepared for it, and I was like, "Holy fuck balls!" I couldn't sleep that night because I was thinking how he must've felt, because he didn't die straight away. They set the car on fire, so he died from that. How awful!

What's been your worst ever heckle?

I'm really lucky, I don't really get heckled. I think because I get so mouthy, people get scared.

The two I have had were both a bit weird. I was in Edinburgh, and whenever I do a comedy club, I like to see who's in my audience so that I can figure out how far I can go. When I asked, "Where's my gays?" some voice from the back of the room shouted, "Dead! Like they should be!" I just didn't know what to say. The other time was in Birmingham when I'd just walked on stage. Before I'd even had the chance to open my mouth, someone shouted, "Gay as fuck!" How gay is fuck?... But yeah, I don't normally get heckled.

If you weren't a comedian, what would you be?

Well, I worked at Sainsbury's for six years, so I'd probably still be there. I really loved it there.

Finally, what wise piece of advice would you offer to someone hoping to follow a similar career path to yourself?

Don't do it - there's more money in finance. I would say that, one, you have to really, really love it. When you're sat on a train station platform by yourself, it's not fun. And two, buy a decent travel pillow. You're always on trains, so make it as comfortable as possible!

Stephen Bailey visits the Gatehouse, Stafford, on Friday 9 February; Guildhall, Derby, on Saturday 10 February; Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry, on Saturday 17 February; The Brawdogg, Leicester, on Friday 23 February; Slade Rooms, Wolverhampton, on Thursday 8 March and Glee Club, Birmingham, on Friday 30 March.

**"When I asked
"Where's my
gays?" some
voice from the
back of the
room shouted
"Dead! Like they
should be!"**

dream job. I want to have a mortgage, so that means I have to save up through my job, but comedy is so expensive to do. I don't need to be famous per se, but the TV stuff I do helps me top up my bank account. I absolutely have no dream to be a celebrity, but I enjoy doing a mix of it all, just because it means one day I can have that mortgage

What's your guilty pleasure?

Soaps. I love Coronation Street, EastEnders and Emmerdale when I know there's going to be a good storyline. I think it's real life sometimes. For instance, someone got shot in Coronation Street the other week



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NINA
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(*The Lion King*)

6-10 MAR
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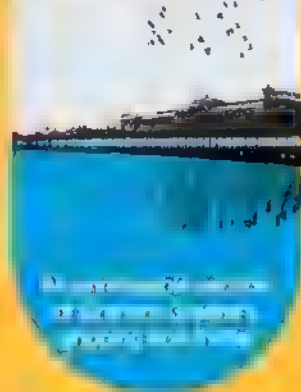
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Wendi Peters,
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MAMMA MIA! 🍷

HERE WE GO AGAIN!



Mamma Mia! has been wowing audiences for nearly 20 years, and there's no sign of its popularity waning. But then why would it, given that the hit show is packed to its proverbial rafters with the chart-topping music of Swedish supergroup Abba! Jenny Ell takes a look at a show that's returning to the Midlands this very month...

One girl, three potential dads, romantic comedy, Greek island; Mamma Mia! is the perfect remedy to banish those winter blues!

Performed to the soundtrack of one of the greatest pop groups of all time, the hit musical has been seen by over 60 million people worldwide in more than 440 cities. It's been playing in London for nearly 20 years and was the eighth longest-running show in Broadway history by the time of its last performance there in 2015.

Seeming to set records wherever it goes, the show boasts some truly flabbergasting statistics. For example, there are 3,120 costumes in the theatre at any one time, 400 metres of lycra is used, the cast gets through 121 bras per show and there are a staggering 33,000 rhinestones hand sewn onto the Super Trouper costumes!

Having given new life to the jukebox musical genre at the turn of the century, it's hard to believe that Mamma Mia! nearly didn't happen. Benny and Bjorn of Abba fame certainly took some convincing by producer Judy Craymer. Craymer is one of three fabulous female creatives on the production. She's joined by director Phyllida Lloyd and writer Catherine Johnson. The three female leads in the show, Donna and the Dynamos, mirror this set up.

Following the release of the 2008 film version, Mamma Mia!'s appeal widened. The movie grossed a stupendous amount at the box office. Meryl Streep, Julie Walters, Amanda Seyfried and Colin Firth all featured in the film's star-studded cast. Apparently, Cher was offered the role of Tanya but had to turn it down due to concert commitments! It went instead to the also fabulous Christine Baranski.

Former James Bond star Pierce Brosnan - who plays Sam in the movie - didn't even know what the film was about when he signed on the dotted line - if was enough for him that Meryl

Street had signed to do it.

The success of the film has inspired a second movie. Mamma Mia! Here We Go Again is due for cinema release in July of this year. Many of the aforementioned actors will be returning for the sequel, with the addition of Lily James as young Donna.

The Mamma Mia! stage show enjoyed a phenomenally successful run at Birmingham Hippodrome in the summer of 2016 and is returning to the Midlands this month at the Wolverhampton Grand. The show has a similar

appeal to Dirty Dancing, in that it tends to attract a significant number of hen parties and large groups of mildly tipsy middle-aged women. That said, though, Mamma Mia! really does have something for everyone. It's also a great warm up for a night on the town - so dust down your sequins and bag yourself a ticket for an evening to remember!

Mamma Mia! shows at the Grand Theatre, Wolverhampton, from 6 to 24 February.



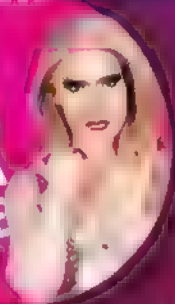
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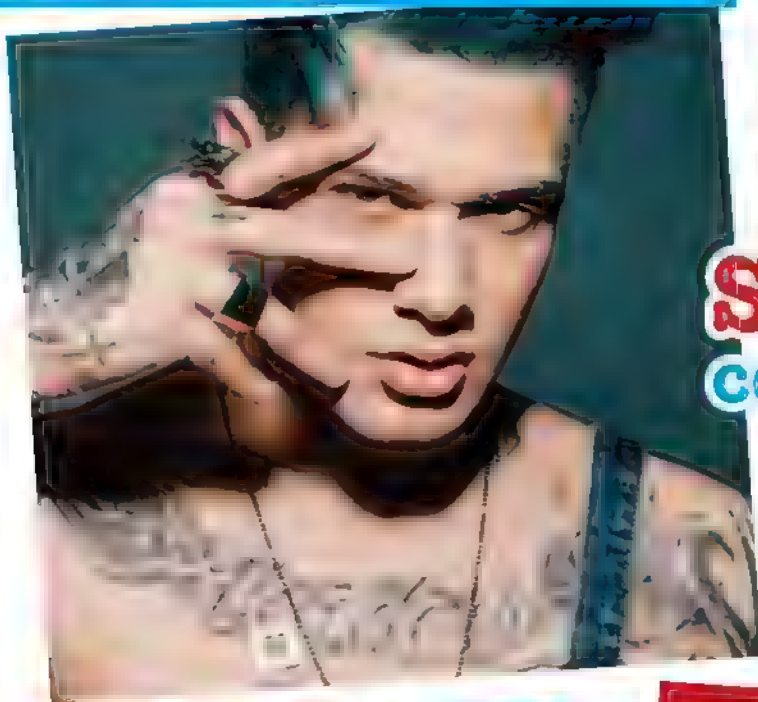
9TH SUM TING WONG

16TH MISS MARTY

23RD SANDRA

What's On

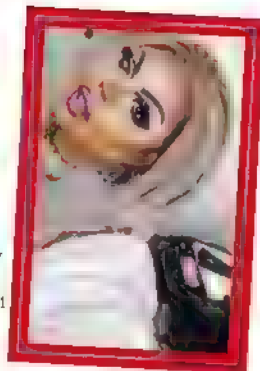
Mon 5 - Sun 11 February



There's Sum Ting Wong at The Village Inn!

Drag Idol finalist Sum Ting Wong heads to Birmingham this month for an action-packed night of cabaret! Her unique comedy style pretty much guarantees you a great night out - especially with all those cheap drinks offers too!

Friday 9 February
The Village Inn,
Birmingham



Sugarboy comes to Brum

This month sees the launch of Sugarboy, a new night for lads who like lads. The event features music from DJ Sam Londt, an appearance by porn star Mickey Taylor and a whole heap of gogoboy. Think twinks, twunks, jocks, femmes and daddies and you'll pretty much get the picture!

Friday 9 February -
The Nightingale, Birmingham

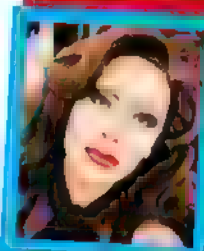
Gareth Gates heads to The Yard



Gareth Gates is heading to popular Coventry gay venue The Yard this month. Gareth will appear live on stage, singing some of his favourite tracks. He'll be sticking around afterwards for a meet and greet too. It's free entry, so pop along and check him out.

Saturday 10 February - The Yard, Coventry

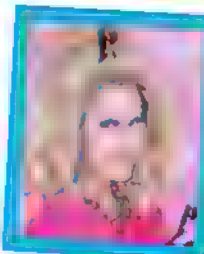
Tanya Hyde heads to Shrewsbury!



Tanya Hyde visits Shrewsbury's Havana Republic as part of its Fabulous Mondays Gay Night this month! The fun-filled evening will be hosted by Miss Penny, who'll be taking the party right through to the early hours.

Monday 6 February
Havana Republic, Shrewsbury

Lisa Q Jones returns! She's back at Brum's Eden Bar



RuPaul's Charlie Hides heads back to Birmingham for another show, this time as Lisa Q Jones! If you've not yet caught up with Lisa, be prepared for a fabulous night of fun and frolics!

Thursday 8 February -
Eden, Birmingham

What's On

Mon 12 - Sun 18 February



Strictly star AJ Pritchard at Wolves venue

Strictly Come Dancing star AJ Pritchard, who was booted off the hit TV show in week 12, puts in a personal appearance at Wolverhampton gay venue Gorgeous this month. He'll be sticking around for a meet-and-greet too!

Saturday 17 February - Gorgeous, Wolverhampton

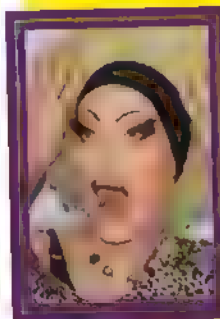
A night dedicated to Whitney Houston!

If you're a fan of Whitney Houston, then this is an event just for you! Birmingham bar The Loft is hosting a night dedicated to all things Whitney. They'll be playing a huge selection of her tracks, with support from other '80s and '90s artists too. It's free entry, so there's no excuse not to go!

Saturday 17 February - The Loft, Birmingham



Coventry cabaret with Divine Miss M



There's yet another night of cabaret to enjoy at Coventry gay venue The Yard this week! This time it's with the fantastic Divine Miss M!

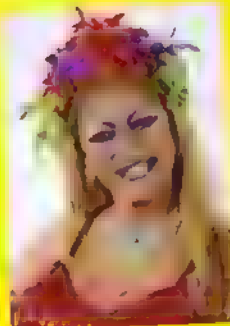
If you haven't visited The Yard yet, then why not pop along?

Friday 16 February - The Yard, Coventry

Party with Marty

Birmingham drag veteran Miss Marty is back at the city's Village Inn this month, getting the dancefloor rocking with her legendary fun and games!

Friday 16 February - The Village Inn, Birmingham



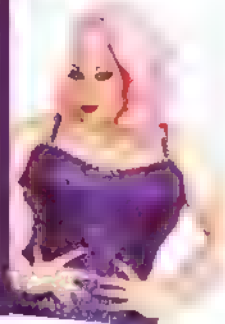
Double cabaret at Eden Bar in Brum



There's a double bill of cabaret at Birmingham's Eden Bar on Saturday the 17th. Join KY Kelly and Fanny Burns for an action-packed show that's sure to have you in stitches!

Get there early - it's set to be a busy one!

Saturday 17 February - Eden, Birmingham



Get roasted at The Loft every Sunday!

Look no further than The Loft in Birmingham for your hangover-soothing Sunday lunch! With an impressive selection of meats available, you'll be hard pressed to find a better offer! Couple it with a cocktail or two and you have the makings of a great afternoon. We'll have the beef, please!

Every Sunday - The Loft, Birmingham

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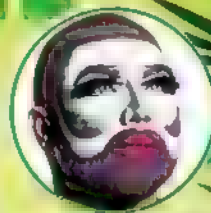
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What's On

Mon 19 - Wed 28 February



Britain's Got Talent's Ruby Murry heads to Brum!

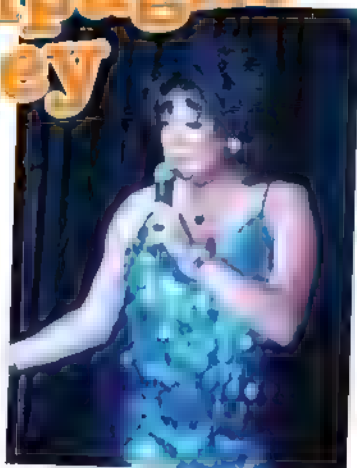
Britain's Got Talent star Ruby Murry will be back at Birmingham's Eden Bar this month for another fabulous night of cabaret. If you've not seen Ruby before, we urge you to pop along and check her out - she's got a fantastic voice and quite rightly has built up an impressive fanbase in the city. It's free entry all night, so be sure to pop along!

Thursday 22 February - Eden, Birmingham

Live cabaret with Champagne Shirley

Fancy a night of great song? Then head over to The Yard in Coventry on the last Friday of the month, when drag queen and cabaret favourite Champagne Shirley will be live on stage.

Friday 23 February - The Yard, Coventry



Sandra's back in town!

The Whore of Hampstead Heath returns home to Birmingham on the 26th for her monthly residency at popular cabaret bar The Village Inn. Alongside Sandra's games and shenanigans, there are plenty of delicious drinks offers to enjoy, as well as the chance to party through to the crack of dawn. Go for it!

Friday 23 February - The Village Inn, Birmingham

Saathi

Brum's biggest monthly gay Asian club night is back!

Birmingham's biggest monthly gay Asian club night returns to the Nightingale on the 23rd - and as usual looks set to provide a fabulous night out! Taking place between 10pm and 4am, with entry costing just £10, it's a great chance to put on your funkiest clothes and party, party, party!

Friday 23rd February - The Nightingale, Birmingham

Mary Mac heads to Brum's Eden Bar!



If you're looking for a night of top cabaret, look no further than the fantastic Mary Mac. Scottish drag queen Mary is an Eden Bar favourite and always puts on a hilarious show. The venue will also be screening the Six Nations rugby too, so why not make a whole day of it?

Saturday 24 February - Eden, Birmingham



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Crab, avocado & watermelon salad, lambs leaf & wholemeal croutes.

Mains

Pan fried, free range duck breast, duck leg croquette, honey glazed artichokes & cherries.

Grilled sea trout, oyster mayonnaise, pickled cucumber, new potatoes.

Charred aubergine, watermelon, halloumi, pine nut & chicory salad.

Desserts

Vanilla crème brûlée, glazed bananas,

Double chocolate brownie, honeycombe, cherry & marshmallow ice cream

British & French cheese, grapes, celery quince & artisan crackers.

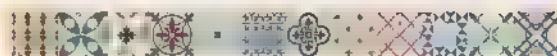
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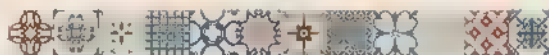
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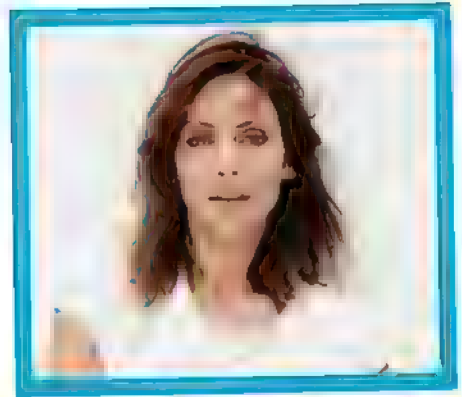
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What's On

Arts Theatre Entertainment



Natalie Imbruglia

Star-of-the-'90s Natalie Imbruglia is happy she's not so famous that she needs a bodyguard. Indeed, in the past she's been keen to point out that she is in fact just an ordinary gal. Ordinary, that is, except for the starring roles in films and on TV, the romances with celebrity men, the massive chart hits, the just-as-massive fanbase and the friendship with Kylie (and wouldn't we all want one of those!) Natalie visits Brum this month with her Acoustic Tour show, an evening of musicmaking magic that had the critics clapping like demented seals when she took it on the road in 2017

Monday 5 February, Town Hall, Birmingham



Matthew Bourne's Cinderella

With its comical ugly sisters, matchmaking fairy god-mother, drop-dead-gorgeous Prince Charming, super-cute mice and fits-one-foot-only glass slipper, you'd think the classic story of Cinderella would've offered Matthew Bourne more than enough to work with when he decided to produce his own ballet version of the much-loved fairytale. But no. The man who burst into the limelight with an all-male production of Swan Lake - some 20-plus years ago now - decided to up the ante by locating his take on the Cinders story in the Second World War. Cue dashing RAF chaps with handlebar moustaches and a desperate desire to stick it to old Adolf where the sun don't shine.

As with most, if not all, of Mr B's marvellously choreographed dance bonanzas, Cinderella has been utterly loved and adored by the critics, some of whom were in danger of oohing and abhing themselves to orgasm. We're not quite *that* taken with the show, but our thumbs are definitely pointing in the direction of the ceiling. Go see...

**Tuesday 6 - Saturday 10 February,
Birmingham Hippodrome**



Erasure



Katherine Ryan

Friday 8 February - Shrewsbury & Telford Museum & Art Gallery
Saturday 9 February - Wolverhampton Grand Theatre

Mamma Mia!

This legendary show is of course a nicely contrived vehicle for the chart topping music of 1970s Super Troupers Abba.

The Swedish Fab Four scored mega hit after mega-hit with catchy numbers like Waterloo, Dancing Queen, The Name Of The Game, The Winner Takes It All and Take A Chance On Me - all of which are present and correct in this blockbuster offering.

Abba boys Benny Andersson and Björn Ulvæus were both involved in the development of the show, while Anni-Frid Lyngstad - she's the dark one - contributed in a financial capacity. A 2008 movie version received a thumbs-up from many if not most of Mamma Mia!'s adoring fans - despite former James Bond star Pierce Brosnan having been given, rather unwisely, a Licence to Sing...

Tuesday 6 - Saturday 24 February,
Wolverhampton Grand Theatre



Showstopper: The Musical

If you like your theatre productions to be as fresh as a clean pair of underpants, Edinburgh Fringe veterans The Showstoppers are definitely the glorious gaggle of laughter merchants for you. Every night's a first night with these guys, as they make up each show from suggestions given to them by the audience.

So whether you fancy some Rodgers & Hammerstein set on a ferris wheel or a little Sondheim on Mount Everest - you suggest it and The Showstoppers will sing it!

Thursday 15 & Friday 16 February,
Leicester Curve

Outing The Town

There are those who say (not us, just to be clear.) that folk in rural counties can be a bit slow to embrace new-fangled ideas. Ideas such as equality, for example. If that *is* true - and we don't believe it for a minute - LGBTs in oh-so-rural Shropshire must've had a thoroughly shitty time back in the pre-equality days of old. After all, back in them thar times, even *city-slickin'* gay boys'n' girls thought the wisest course of action was probably to stay in the closet (preferably behind a big smelly coat that nobody ever wanted to wear). By comparison, gays in *rural counties* must've been hiding so far back in the closet they were in imminent danger of falling into Narnia!

Anyways up, as part of Shropshire's celebration of the National Festival of LGBT History, this fascinating exhibition explores the county's hidden gay past.

The show is also a rallying cry to the LGBT community to help preserve the objects that tell the stories that have often been airbrushed out of history.

Anyone interested in sharing their tales or donating an object to Shropshire Museums should contact Shrewsbury Museum & Art Gallery at shrewsbury.museum@shropshire.gov.uk

Throughout February,
Shrewsbury Museum & Art Gallery

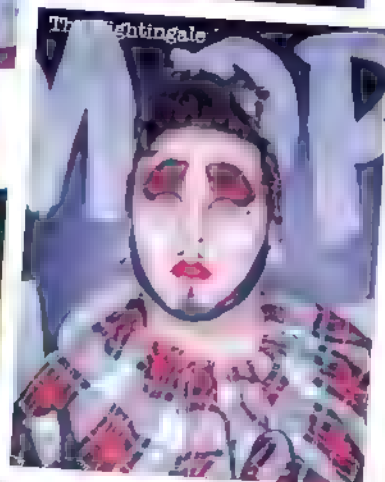
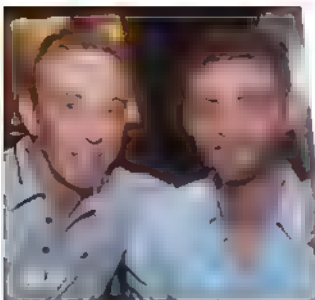
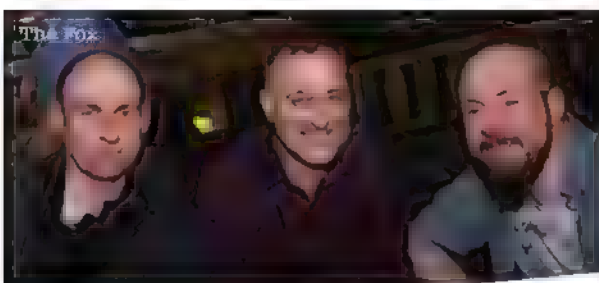


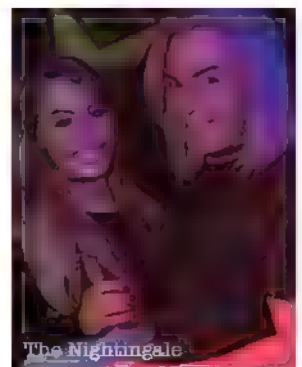
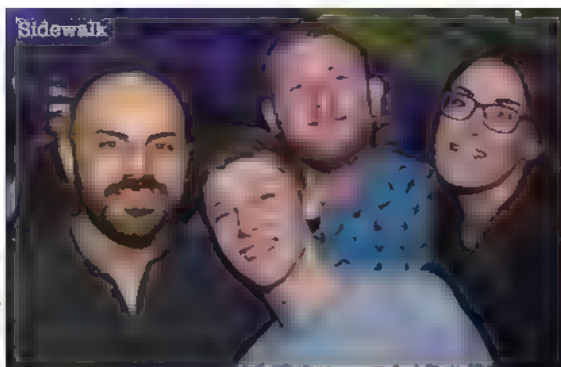
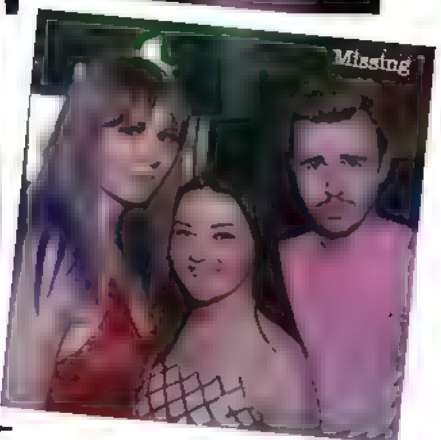
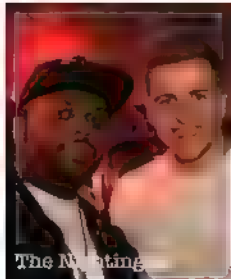
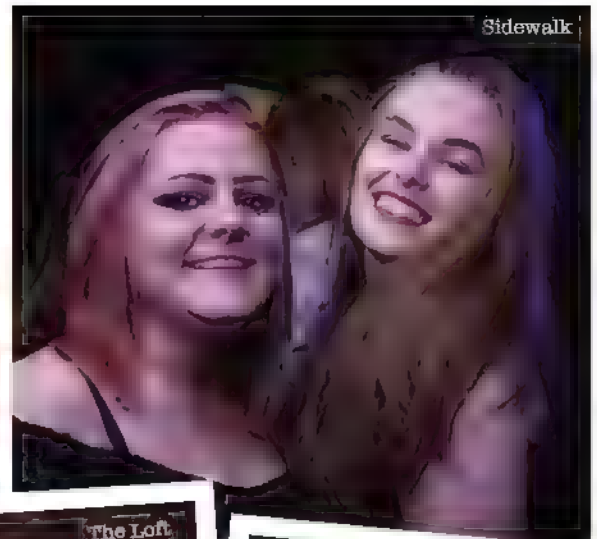
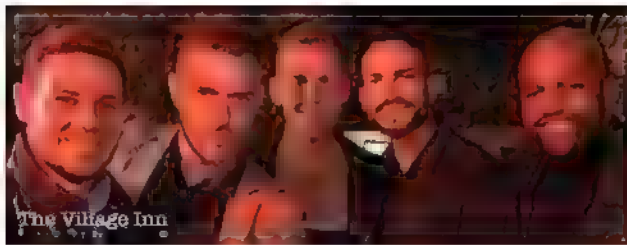
Nadine Coyle at The Nightingale

Party all night in vibrant Birmingham

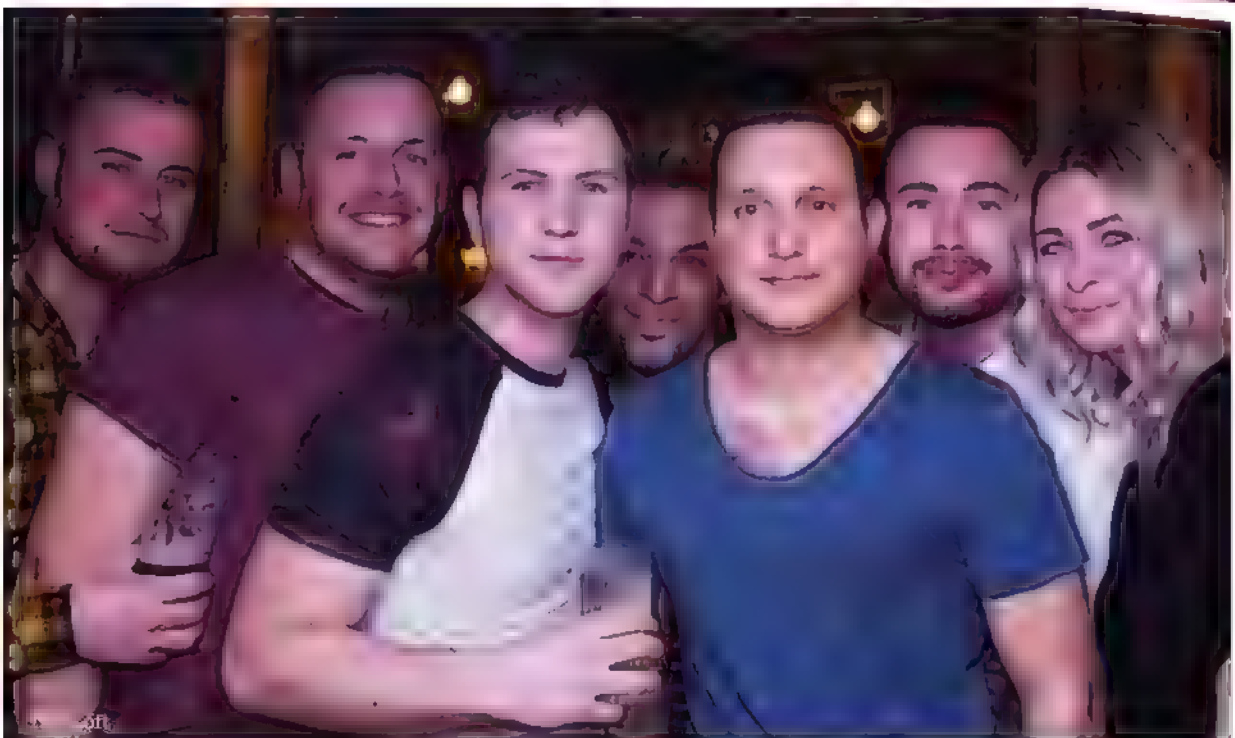
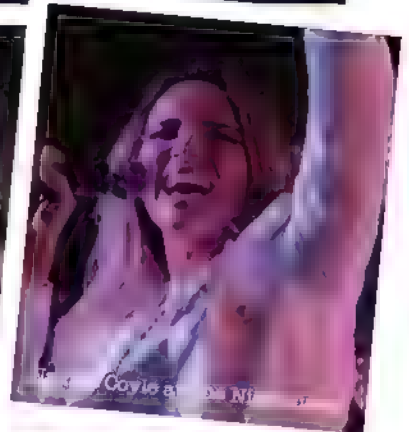
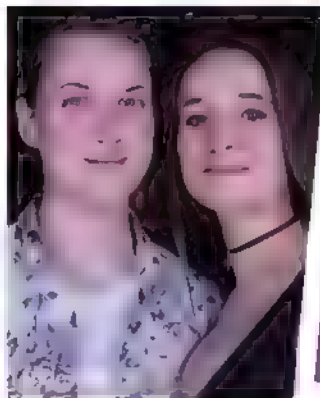
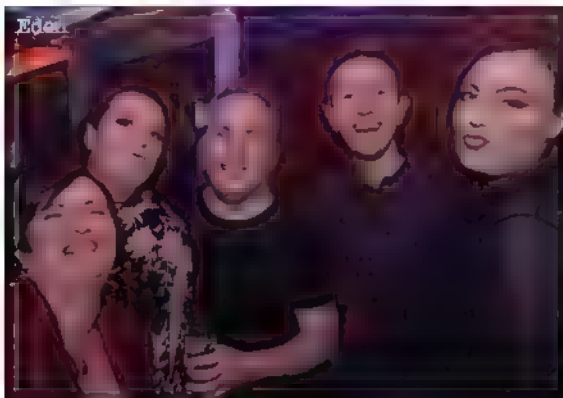
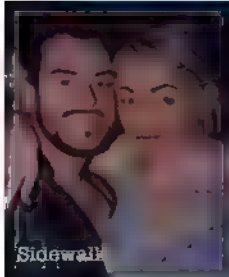
If you're out for the night in Birmingham, then the city's gay scene is a great place to be!

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Party all night in club Birmingham





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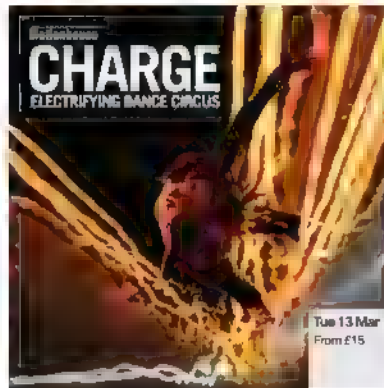
Wed 28 Feb
£25



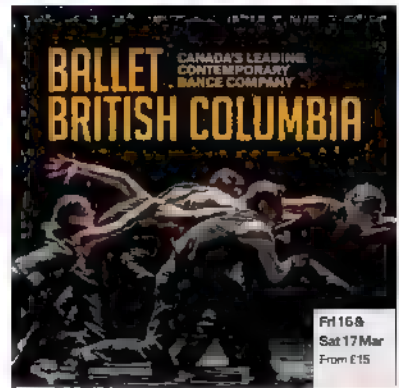
Tue 6
Thu 8 Mar
From £18



Sun 11 Mar
From £15



Tue 13 Mar
From £15



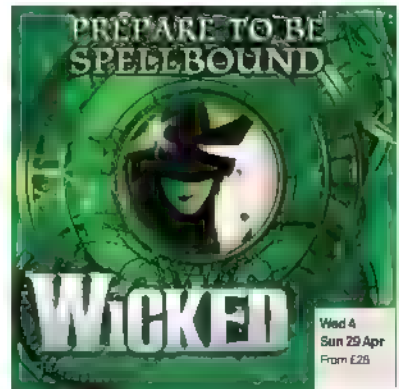
Fri 16 &
Sat 17 Mar
From £15



Tue 20
Sat 24 Mar
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Tue 27
Sat 31 Mar
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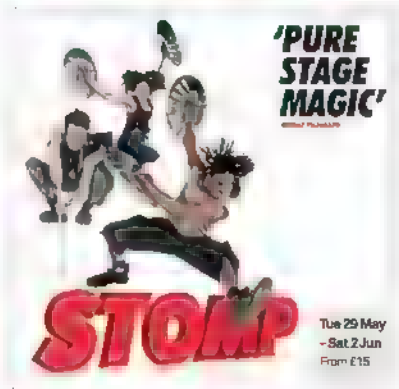
Wed 4
Sun 29 Apr
From £25



Tue 1
Sat 12 May
From £19.50



Mon 21
Sat 26 May
From £18



Tue 29 May
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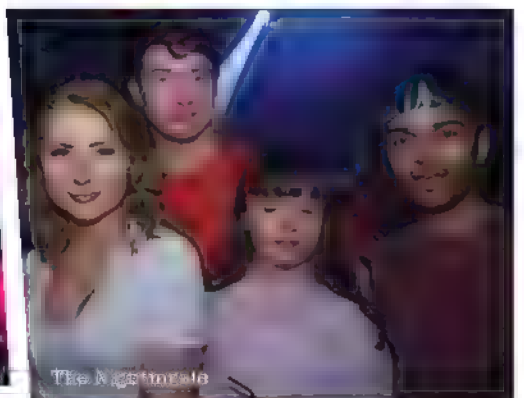
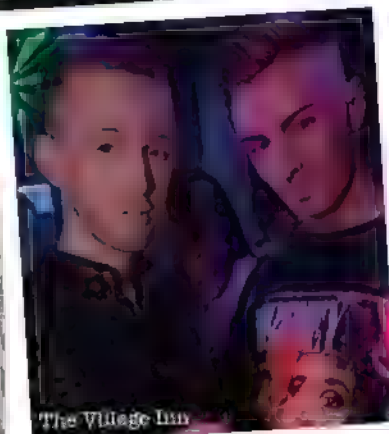
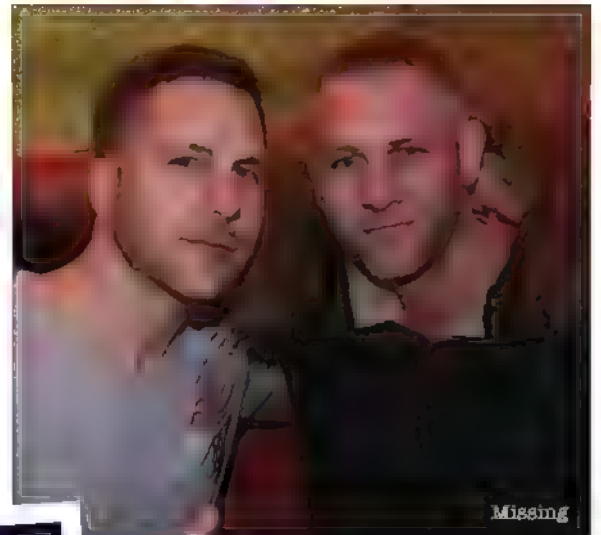
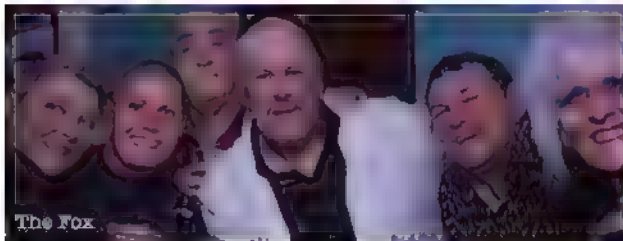
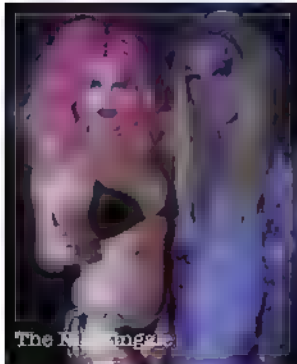
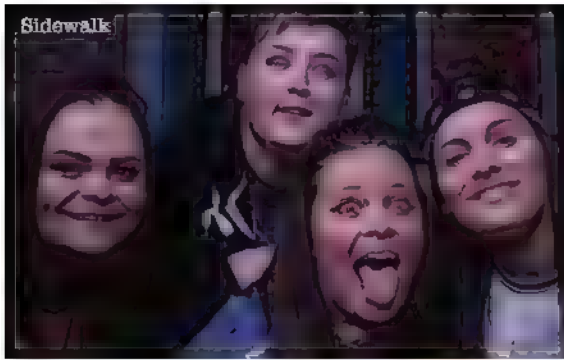
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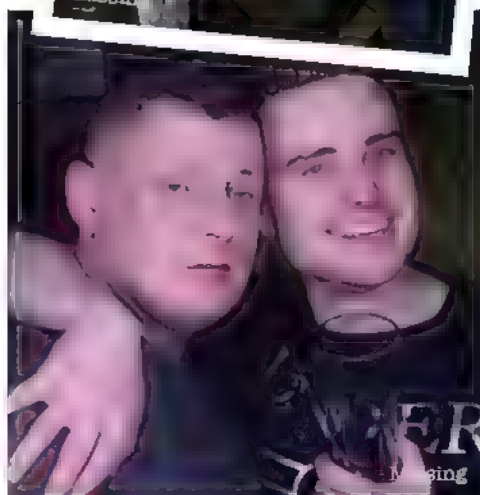
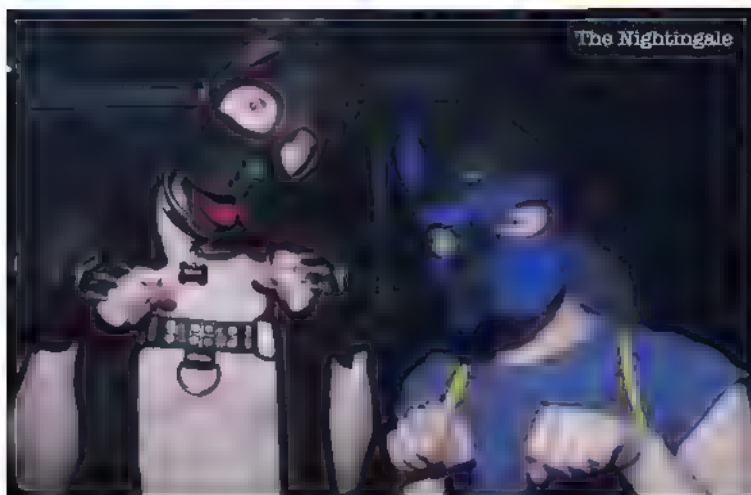
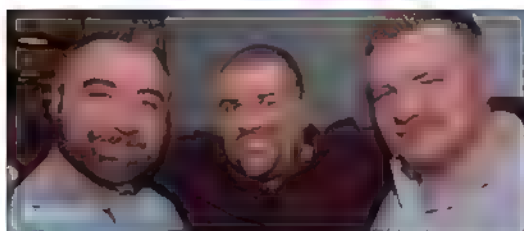
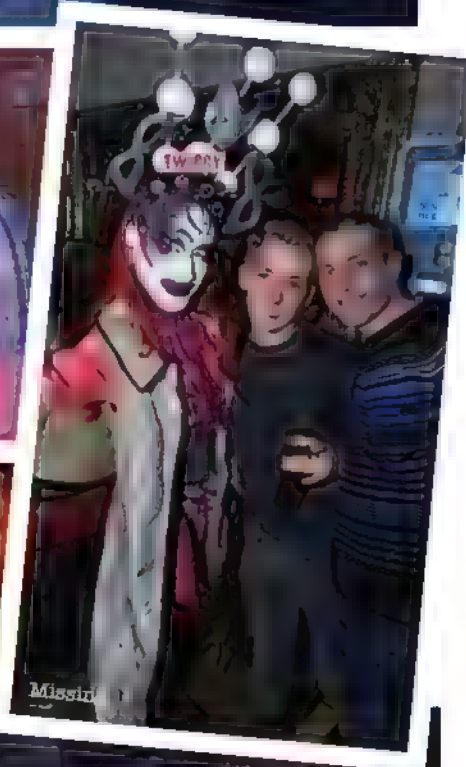
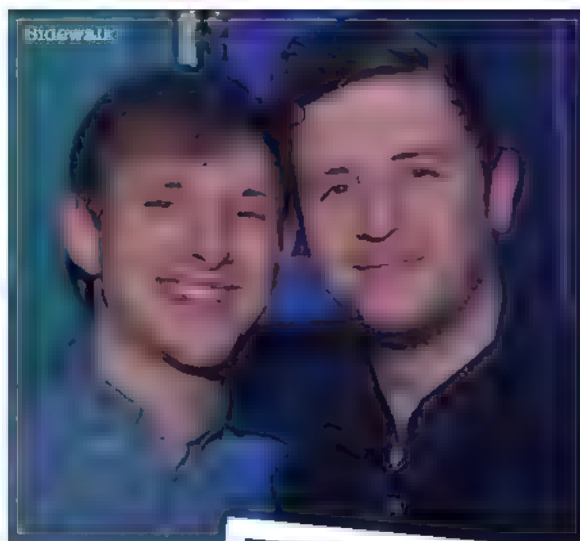
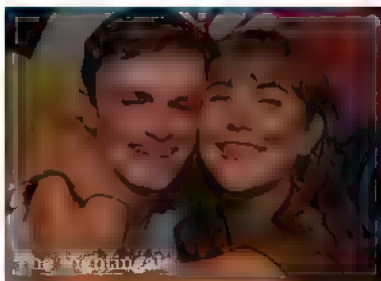
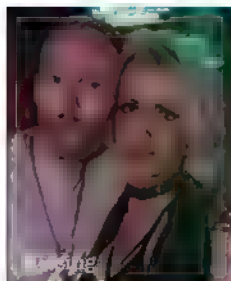
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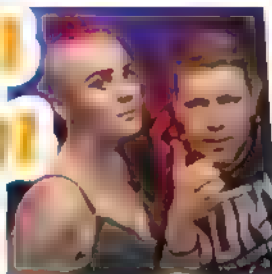
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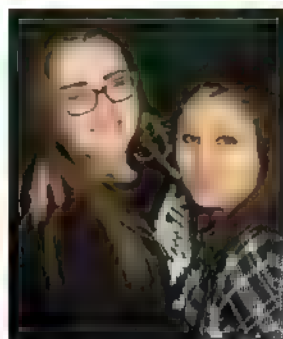
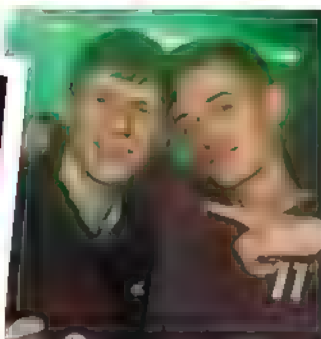
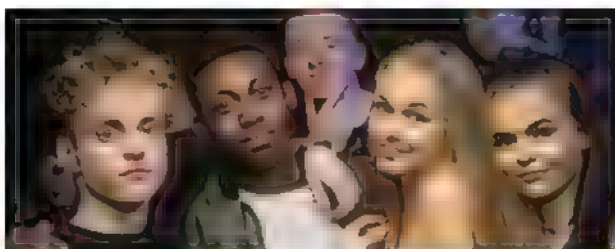
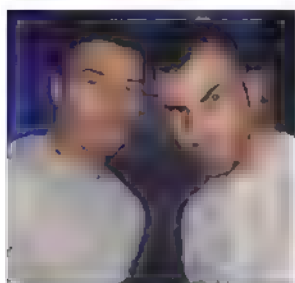


A Gorgeous night out in Wolverhampton



If you're looking to party in Wolverhampton, head down to local LGBT venue Gorgeous for an evening of top-class revelry!

Bringing together a great atmosphere, cracking drinks offers, fabulous customers and fantastic music, the venue offers a truly Gorgeous night out!



Pictures by First Reunion Media

FRIDAY CABARET



FRIDAY 2ND FEB

MISS MARTY

FRIDAY 9TH FEB

FANNY BURNS

FRIDAY 16TH FEB

DIVINE MISS M

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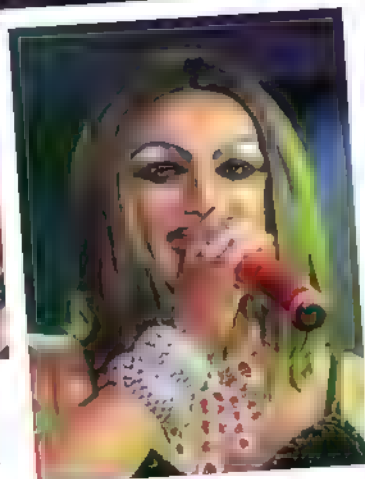
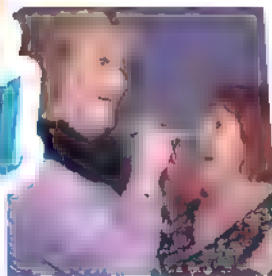
@theyardcoventry



The Yard, 11-12 Bull Yard, Coventry, CV1 1LH
www.theyardcoventry.co.uk 024 7501 2959

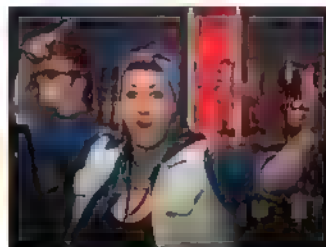
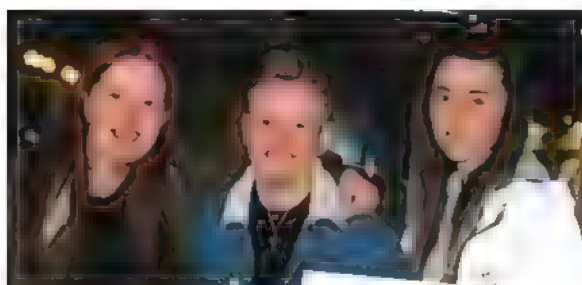


It's a great night out at The Yard



If you're looking to party in Coventry, head for LGBT venue The Yard and enjoy an evening of top-class revelry!

Bringing together a great atmosphere, cracking drinks offers, fabulous customers and top-notch weekly cabaret, the venue offers a truly fantastic night out!



Pictures by The Yard

GAY BARS & CLUBS IN THE MIDLANDS...

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CLUB CHIC

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THE CORE

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Tel: 0121 622 2797
www.thecoreclub.co.uk

DEVILS KITCHEN

Kent St, B5 6NB

EDEN BAR

Sherlock St, B5 6NB
Tel: 0121 622 1953
www.theedenbar.co.uk
f/eden.bar

RHAPSODY BAR

Hurst St B5 6SE
Tel: 0121 622 4046

FOUNTAIN INN

Wrentham St B5 6QL
Tel: 0121 622 1452

THE FOX

17 Lower Essex St,
B5 6SN Tel: 0121 622 3213

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www.glamorousbirmingham.co.uk

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THE LOFT

142 Bromsgrove St,
B5 6RG
Tel: 0121 6222 444
www.theloftlounge.co.uk

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Hurst St, B5 6NU
Tel: 0121 622 4256
www.missingbar.co.uk
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THE NIGHTINGALE

Kent St, B5 6RD
Tel: 0121 622 1718
www.nightingaleclub.co.uk
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SIDEWALK

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Tel: 0121 666 6220
www.sidewalkbirmingham.co.uk

THE VILLAGE INN

Hurst St, B5 4BD
Tel: 0121 622 4742
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72 Bristol St, B5 7AH
Tel: 0121 622 2592

COVENTRY

THE YARD

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GLOUCESTER

THE WESTGATE

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www.havanarepublic.co.uk/
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f/gorgeousbar

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WIN! A pair of weekend tickets to **L FEST 2018!**

The UK's only lesbian festival moves to a brand new venue this year - Bodafon Farm, Llandudno, Wales - right on the beach.

Spread across four days and featuring a whole host of music, arts and entertainment, the 2018 edition is set to be one of the biggest yet and includes live music, dance, cabaret, DJs, comedy, arts, literature and film.

A great weekend for friends and families, L Fest caters for 'solos' too - you'll make more friends than ever before!

Tickets are on sale now and start at £60 per day and £99

for the weekend. But hurry! They're selling out rapidly!

However, we've got a pair of weekend camping tickets to give away, so if you do miss out on buying your own, you've still got a chance.

To enter our not-to-be-missed competition, just visit midlandszone.co.uk and answer the following question.

L Fest is being held in which country this year?

- A) England
- B) Wales
- C) Scotland



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TORVILL & DEAN'S
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Kwik Prick is a free rapid HIV test for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans communities, and is available at Trade every Monday from 12 noon until 6pm.

- Free and confidential
- Uses only a finger prick blood sample
- Result within minutes
- 99.7% accurate
- May detect HIV exposure from as little as 4 weeks ago

Drop-in service every Monday*, 12 noon until 6pm.
Appointments can be made for other days.

Location: **Trade, 2nd Floor,
27 Bowling Green Street, Leicester, LE1 6AS**
For more information call us on **0116 254 1747**
or visit us at **www.tradesexualhealth.com**

*Kwik Prick is not available on Public Holidays
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Day: Thursdays
Time: 3pm - 6pm
Place: 61 Bedford Street, Leicester, LE1 3JR

Further information available
www.leicestersexualhealth.nhs.uk

 You can also check out Trade Sexual Health
www.tradesexualhealth.com



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Coming Soon

ecobee.com

Amazon Echo Spot ▶

Echo Spot brings you everything you love about Alexa in an all new stylish and compact design that can show you things. Just ask to see the weather, get the news with a video flash briefing, set a music alarm (Amazon Music, Spotify & TuneIn supported), see lyrics with Amazon Music, consult your calendar, browse and listen to audiobooks, and plenty more. Personalise your Spot with a collection of clock faces to suit your style, or set a photo background from Prime Photos. Plus, make calls to friends and family between supported Echo devices or the Alexa App.

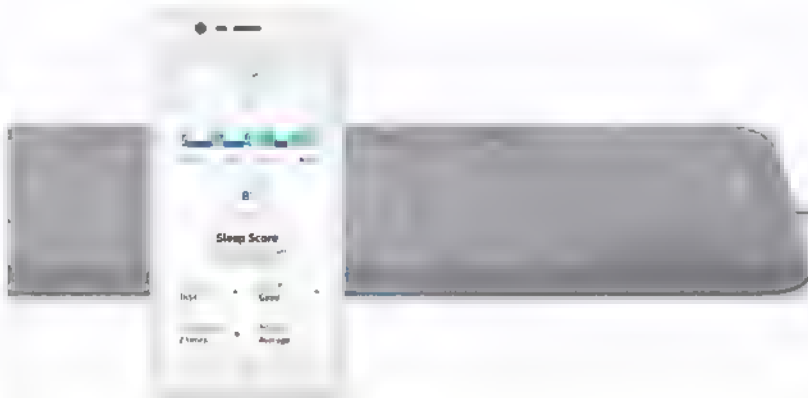
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Nokia Sleep ▲

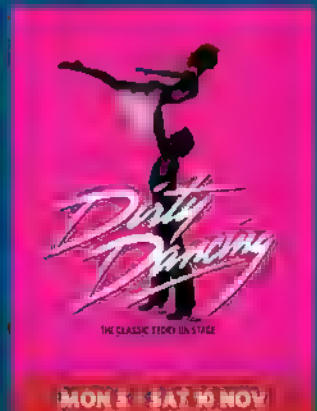
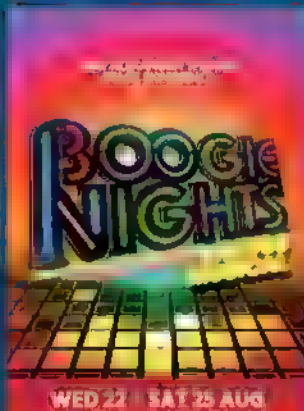
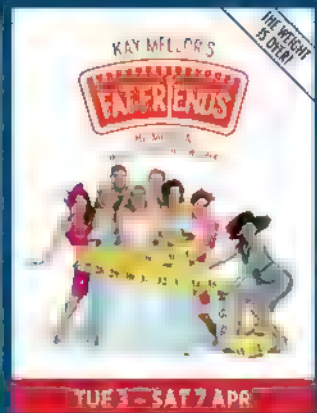
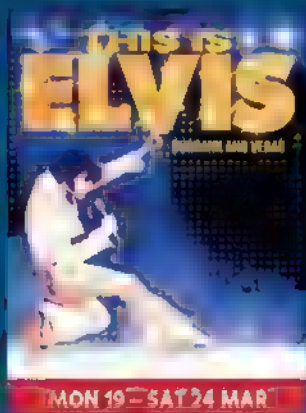
The new Nokia Sleep offers sleep cycles analysis (deep, light and REM), heart rate tracking and snore detection. With easy one-time setup and automatic sync to the Health Mate app via Wi-Fi, it also features IFTTT integration for scenarios such as dimming lights when you go to bed, or turning up your

thermostat when you get up. Wake up every day to a Sleep Score in the Nokia Health Mate app that shows you if your night was restorative. In the app you can also take advantage of the Sleep Smarter programme, so that you can improve your nights over time.

Coming Soon

health.nokia.com

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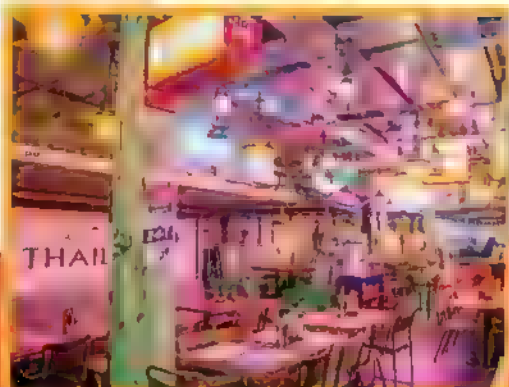
munch

Food and drink news from across the Midlands...

The award-winning Sabai Sabai has opened its fourth Thai restaurant, its third in Birmingham. The new eatery is housed in the city centre-located Grade II listed building that was formerly the home of Legal & General Assurance Society Limited.

Founded 14 years ago by Jureerat Dykins and her partner, Torquil Chidwick, the first Sabai Sabai restaurant opened in Moseley, with Jureerat's Thai mum as the head chef. This was followed in 2011 by a second eatery, in Harborne, and then a third in Stratford-upon-Avon in 2016.

"We'd been looking to open in the city centre for a long time, but the right venue hadn't come up," explains Torquil of the new eatery. "We thought this beautiful building was perfect. In terms of atmosphere, decor and size, it's very much a mixture of the two other city restaurants. We wanted the new place to have its own identity, so it's very different in decor and tableware. The only thing we've kept the same is the food and cocktails. The bar area is bigger than in our other restaurants - we really want people to see Sabai Sabai as somewhere they can pop into for a cocktail or two."



Zip! Thai street food hits Leicester

Pieminister create their first vegan pie

After nearly a year of mixing, rolling and baking, pie-making company Pieminister have created their first vegan pie. Kevin is made with British chestnut mushrooms, tomato and red wine with baby onions, red quinoa and thyme.

The pie, which is registered with the Vegan Society and carries their trusted trademark, is available for Midlands vegans to try out in Pieminister's Birmingham and Nottingham restaurants



Birmingham's favourite street food event, Digbeth Dining Club, is now taking place every Thursday, Friday and Saturday from 4pm.

Expect hand-picked traders from around the country, collaborations with popular Birmingham brands, live music nights and, of course, delicious street food.

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THE LIFE OF A THIRTYSOMETHING GAY

the Stephen Spinks Column

“Home is where the heart is”

They always say it's fashionable to arrive late to the party - and I'm certainly doing that. This particular life-changing party is not only the must of the season but also a slippery fish and a pain in the ass - the party of home ownership.

I'm led to believe that everyone's doing it, or so my family would have me think. It's the thing to do, apparently. Get a place, settle down, find a man and live the rest of my life in apparent Utopian bliss. Hmm! I'm not so sure whose dream this really is? Whilst the house is an undoubted boon, the rest is... well, let's just say that I'm not holding my breath, but am instead going about the business of living life in my own kinda way

Removing the rose-tinted spectacles of those family members and friends who're already homeowners, as I see it we're still very much in a housing crisis. First-time buyers - as I myself would be - have been priced out of the market for years. Property prices have soared and the size of the place you're buying has shrunk to a tiny version of something that's allegedly habitable. Affordable homes for first-time buyers are either old or knackered in run-down communities filled with crime, or they're city-slicker pads that require you to sell a kidney and 20 years of sperm just to get past the front door. Once you're in, you can't swing the proverbial cat.

In fact, according to the latest Halifax First-Time Buyer Review, published in January 2017, the number of first-time buyers is estimated to have reached 335,750 in 2016, which is apparently a 10-year high. In 2008 this milestone was at an all-time low of 192,300; that's a 75% increase in 10 years. Great - perhaps my family can be smug after all. Jeez.

However, it's not all clapping in the aisles and pats on the back. The average first-time buyer deposit has more than doubled over the past decade, from £15,168 in 2006 to £32,321 in 2016 - an increase of 113%. In London, it's an eye-watering £100,000. Now I don't know about you, but I don't have a spare £30k behind the sofa, my family are not in a

position to help, and I already work enough hours in a day to mean that taking a third job would be, well, a little ridiculous.

Those who do manage to scrimp, save and limp onto the property ladder immediately end up facing the overzealous fat-cat rubbing his hands with glee. After all, finding an affordable mortgage inevitably means choosing a term well beyond 25 years just to cover the average first-time buyer house price, which now passes £200,000 across the wider UK and £400,000 in good old London Town. It's a ball and chain with a whole new meaning. As I pass through my mid-30s, the chance of anything more than 25 years on a mortgage is becoming a thing of dreams. It's a double whammy!

All of this is compounded by the fact that Millennials are now earning on average 20% less than their baby-boomer parents, despite being, generally speaking, more educated and with greater access to universities and other educational opportunities.

And yet over the last year, I've been feeling the compulsion to finally give home ownership a go. I'm fed up with dodgy landlords, useless agents and endless rental fees. It's time to bite the bullet.

Of course, saving the deposit is really the hardest part. It means being frugal, cutting your cloth and being a grown up. And as anyone who knows me well would tell you, cutting my cloth is not something I always do very successfully.

I suddenly feel like I'm in an episode of *Ab Fab*. You know, that one called Poor, when Eddie is cut off from her alimony payments and is forced by Saffy to downsize! It's the same nightmare.

Nevertheless, I'm determined to make it happen. I love the idea that with hard graft and a lot of careful planning I can do this on my own. When the time comes to buy, it will be because of me, no one else, and what I buy will be mine alone. It's kinda satisfying.

So I'm being savvy and googling for advice. I've never read so much from Martin Lewis, and as a result I've opened my

Help To Buy ISA.

I'm doing the unthinkable and downsizing my ridiculously oversized two-bedroom Victorian house in Kings Heath for a teeny-tiny flat in Moseley at half the rent (better postcode, darling - boom!). I'm selling furniture, worldly possessions (and that stash of kitchen gadgets from Ikea I always knew I never needed) like there's no tomorrow.

Then there's going out. I'm going to be sensible. A night out will be a treat. A reward. I will eat out less, rediscover my oven, cook better and probably be fitter for it. As Patsy said, 'You can't expect everyone in Knightsbridge to eat out every day, darling'. I will find things to do that are free, and continue with my pledge to give more time to charity and be an active and willing participant in Moseley community life.

It's a whole new drama, and I'm more than happy to give it a go. In a weird sort of way, it's kind of a thrill. Cutting out things, downsizing, watching the savings grow and keeping an eye on the swanky pads I want to buy is a new type of motivation. It's highly addictive.

There's so much development in Birmingham that flats are springing up everywhere at the moment. New, old, converted factories in the Jewellery Quarter and elsewhere are transforming the look and feel of this city - and I for one can't wait to have one. It's got to be worth all the hardship... hasn't it?



CAT'S CORNER

“ Same name ”

People tend to focus on the whole same bodies bit of same-sex relationships. Their minds tend to wander to the whole twin dongs or quadruple boobs aspect of gayness. Of course, there's nothing wrong with doubling up on genitalia - it does mean you can do loads of cool stuff - but bodies tend to be so different that, even when they're of the same gender, the sameness is generally always less the focus than the differences. Of course, it does make the whole process of merging much easier when you can share the same wardrobe.

But lately I've begun to realise that perhaps the most distinctive thing about same-sex relationships is not having the same bodies. I think it's actually those occasions when couples have the same names.

I've met a few couples with the same names over the years - it's bound to happen sometimes. Two Sues, two Sarahs, two Kates - you get the picture. Of course, it could happen with straight couples too - Joe and Jo, Francis and

Frances, Sam and Sam - but it just doesn't seem to be that common. Do straight people just have more sense? I recently met Catherine and Catherine (nothing wrong with that name, of course), who found each other several years ago. I'm constantly impressed with how couples like this come to terms with shouting out their own name at key relationship moments - either at times of extreme excitement or extreme anger. It must be weird to hear yourself screaming your own name.

But what they don't seem to realise is how hard it is for everyone else. Catherine and Catherine both like to be known as Cath, and they've cutely double-barrelled together their surnames. In an effort to make things easier for us, one of them (I couldn't tell you which one) changed the spelling of her name to Kath. This is great when you're writing them a letter but completely useless when you're on the phone. They seem to think that when they say, 'It's Cath', other people should be able to sense

whether they're pronouncing it with a K or a C. Most of the time, I just assume it doesn't matter which one I'm speaking to. It's impossible to avoid the ultimate merge and just call them the Caths, which makes me shudder in the same way as those pageants do where identical twins are dressed identically so that everyone coos at them.

It's enough to turn a person straight.



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ON THE BALL

with
Steve Ball

Your country needs you!

When I was a student in Lincoln in the late 1970s, I was friends with an RAF guy based at the local airbase. The authorities found out that he was gay and in a relationship with another serviceman. All hell broke loose and he ended up in a military prison.

How things have changed. Last month, the British army, currently about 4,000 soldiers short, launched a new £1.6million recruitment campaign targeting, amongst others, LGBT people. In one video, a gay man says he was happy to open up about being in a gay relationship despite fears that he would be treated badly. "I was really worried about whether I'd be accepted," he says, "but within days, I was more than confident about being

who I was."

It's a positive step that the Army are officially recognising what anyone who's served in the military will tell you - that some of the Army, Air Force and Navy's greatest heroes and everyday servicemen and women at every rank have been gay. And no one has bothered too much about it. But anyone joining the Army and expecting rainbows and unicorns will be in for a shock. As Wayne Sharrocks, a former soldier, told the Guardian: "Brutal physical punishments are common. Fear of questioning orders is instilled early on, while the army uses sophisticated techniques to remove the aversion to killing. All this has negative impacts on soldiers' mental health."

It's great that the armed forces are thinking about how to be more inclusive and show that soldiers' emotional health is a priority, but the best way for the armed forces to protect young people is not to recruit under-18s at all. The UK is one of very few countries that still recruits 16-year-olds into the services, yet research has shown that young people recruited to the army are at higher risk of post-traumatic stress, self-harm and suicide.

If the army is to be more reflective of the society it seeks to protect, it doesn't just need to be more inclusive with its recruitment campaigns; it needs to challenge the bullying and harassment that characterises so much of life in the military. Only then will the armed forces be truly tolerant.



FEB - JUL 2018

THEATRE COMEDY DANCE MUSIC FAMILIES



Image from Funniest Dance Company

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THE VIRAL ROUND-UP

Here's what we've been looking at online...

We all do it - spend hours on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube. Often we're distracted from what we should be doing by cat videos and funny pranks - or by something feelgood that's been shared so much on the net it's officially classed as 'viral'. Well, here are some of Midlands Zone's favourites from the past month!



WHAT WOULD YOU DO IF YOUR DAD RECOGNISED YOUR BOYFRIEND FROM GAY PORN?

Imagine you took your new boyfriend, who just happens to be a gay porn star, over to your parents' house for the first time. How do you think you'd react if your dad had an inkling as to who he actually was,

and then realised he was a hot, gay, porn star? Well, this hilarious SNL comedy sketch plays it out perfectly. Check out the video on YouTube at: youtu.be/gTnqJRFL7Gc

CELEB SNAPS!

Our fave celebrity Instagram pics...



We'd love to be on that boat with British swimmer Adam Peaty!



Just look at Strictly's A&J Pritchard!



Adam Lambert is looking fierce here!

Would you ride the tube in just your pants?...



...These guys did! Last month saw a large number of commuters take the annual No Trousers Tube Ride wearing, you guessed it, no trousers. The brave bunch, including friend of Midlands Zone and Editor of Beyond Positive, Tom Hayes, paraded their bulges for all to see.

Tom wrote on Twitter: "It may seem odd to you, but it's a genuinely fun event. It brings smiles and silly giggles, which let's face it, we could all use more of at the moment."

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